

Obama: No Specific, Credible Holiday Threat



President Barack Obama, accompanied by, from left, Office of National Intelligence Director James Clapper, Vice President Joe Biden, and Secretary of State John Kerry, walks away from the podium after speaking at the National Counterterrorism Center in McLean, Va., Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015. The president said U.S. intelligence and counter-terrorism professionals don't have any specific, credible information suggesting a terrorist attack on the U.S. during the holidays.

(AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

McLEAN, Virginia (AP) — President Barack Obama said Thursday that U.S. intelligence and counter-terrorism officials have received no specific, credible information suggesting a potential terrorist attack against the United States. He said Americans must be vigilant this holiday season. "We cannot give in to fear or change how we live our lives," Obama said in brief remarks to employees at the National Counterterrorism Center.

"We will not be terrorized. We've prevailed over much greater threats than this; we will prevail again." Obama spoke after a briefing by his national security team on the current threat level, the effort to combat extremist groups and propaganda abroad, and steps to tighten scrutiny of people entering the U.S. on visas. It was the second security briefing the White House has highlighted this week as the president tries to

reassure the public in the wake of the shooting in San Bernardino, California. The president visited the Pentagon on Monday for an update on the U.S.-led fight against the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria. On Thursday, Obama noted he was briefed on the K-1 visa program, which one of the attackers in San Bernardino used to come to the U.S. in July 2014. Obama said the threat of terrorism has evolved to

include smaller groups or individuals, making detection harder. He said the U.S. was constantly "upping our game" to match the new threats. He said the U.S. was focused on three areas: going after terrorists overseas; working to prevent terrorists from entering the country; and strengthening ties between law enforcement and local communities and the technology sector to prevent attacks at home. □



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Carter admits improper use of email account

LOLITA C. BALDOR

ROBERT BURNS

Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq (AP) — U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter acknowledged on Thursday he sometimes used a personal, unsecured email account to conduct official business after he took office in February, a practice he called “entirely my

his messages, which appeared to be largely about meetings and speeches, were backed up for record keeping on the department's email system. Earnest made clear that Carter had erred in his email practices, but he said the consequences did not seem significant. He said the Pentagon had

runner for the Democratic presidential nomination, used her private account exclusively during her four years as the nation's top diplomat. Unlike Carter, Clinton also used her own private server set up in her home. Carter used an iPhone.

He told reporters that when he joined President Barack

Obama's Cabinet in February, he was instructed in email security. He also has made cybersecurity one of his top policy priorities at the Pentagon, which is among the most frequently and intensively targeted government agencies by international hackers. An incursion last summer caused the Pentagon to shut down for weeks an unclassified email system used by senior officials.

In Washington, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said that in light of the attention given to Clinton's email use, it was “hard to believe that Secretary Carter would exercise the same error in judgment.”

McCain said the committee has requested copies of the emails and will conduct a review “to ensure sensitive information was not compromised.”



U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter, second left, is welcomed by Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) Qubad Talabani, left, on arrival in Irbil, northern Iraq, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015. Carter acknowledged he sometimes used a personal, unsecured email account to conduct official business after he took office in February, a practice he called “entirely my mistake.”

(AP Photo/Seivan M.Salim)

mistake.”

His admission followed a New York Times report revealing that he continued the practice even after Hillary Clinton triggered a wave of criticism in March for using a private email account to conduct government business while she was secretary of state. The FBI and several congressional committees are investigating Clinton.

Presidential chief of staff Denis McDonough found out in May about Carter's emailing and, through White House counsel, expressed concern to Pentagon lawyers, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. Carter nonetheless persisted, telling reporters Thursday that he ended the practice “a few months ago.”

Carter said he did not use his phone for classified information. The Defense Department said all

expressed willingness to cooperate with congressional inquiries.

Carter did not respond directly when asked by a reporter whether he had stopped using his personal account only after the Times filed a Freedom of Information request in September for some of his emails.

He repeated that he had stopped “a few months ago. And basically, what that means is I was doing it for longer than I should have.”

“I should have known better,” Carter said while visiting Irbil, Iraq, where U.S. troops are training and advising Kurdish forces. “It's not like I didn't have the opportunity to understand what the right thing to do was. I didn't do the right thing.”

“It's entirely my mistake. Entirely on me.”

Clinton, now the front-

AP: Libya's rival parliaments sign unity government deal

SAMIA ERRAZZOUKI

RAMI MUSA

Associated Press

SKHIRAT, Morocco (AP) — Hopes that divided, war-ravaged Libya can pull itself together and fend off advancing Islamic State extremists soared on Thursday, as the country's rival factions signed a U.N.-brokered deal to form a unity government that is meant to bring about peace.

But the lawmakers from Libya's rival parliaments who hugged and celebrated at the signing ceremony in Morocco still face the enormous task of convincing the deal's many opponents back home — including rival political factions and heavily armed militias — that compliance is worthwhile.

Libya slid into chaos following the 2011 toppling and killing of dictator Moammar Gadhafi. Since then, its divisions only increased, and now it has two governments and parliaments — the internationally recognized one in the country's east, and an Islamist-backed one in the capital, Tripoli.

The agreement aims to create a new national government in Tripoli, end the divide between the rival parliaments, governments and military coalitions, and give the international community a partner for its battle against the IS's affiliate in Libya and human traffickers.

The agreement also envisages a presidential council tasked to choose the Cabinet, which includes a prime minister, five deputies, and three state ministers. Fayez Serraj, a member of the eastern parliament from Tripoli, will head the council.

“On paper, this is fantastic news,” said analyst Claudia Gazzini of International Crisis Group. “In practice, the uncertain level of support for the agreement in Libya, the fact that the leadership of both existing parliaments oppose it and are busily devising their own peace plan, and the fact that the new government will have little control over key parts of the country have left many skeptical.”

The document was signed by Emhemed Shoaib, the deputy speaker of the internationally recognized Libyan parliament, and Salah al-Makhzoum, the second deputy of the Islamist-backed parliament based in Tripoli, among others. But it has detractors on both sides who seek a separate deal without U.N. involvement.

“We know well that the document of political accord in its current form is not the perfect thing that everyone wants, but at the same time, this political accord is a stage on the path to rescue Libya from collapsing and to ensure its unity,” al-Makhzoum said.

Shoaib said the deal is meant to say “goodbye to weapons” that Libya is awash in.

The speakers of the two parliaments — Tripoli-based Nuri A.M. Abusahmain and Aguila Saleh Issa from the east — were not at the Morocco ceremony. The two, who are seen by analysts as hard-liners, held talks on Tuesday in Malta to forge a separate deal without U.N. involvement.

Afterward, they issued a statement saying the representatives who travelled to Morocco were not mandated to represent the parliaments in the talks.

Before the start of Thursday's ceremony, Al-Makhzoum and Faraj Abu-Hashem, the spokesman for the east-based parliament, told The Associated Press that 88 lawmakers from the two parliaments were present at the signing. □

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Lawmakers seek details on vetting for those bound for US

**ALICIA A. CALDWELL
TAMI ABDOLLAH**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

The U.S. has checked social media in some capacity in refugee cases and has found, in a small sampling thus far, the information can be ambiguous in screening value and frequently inaccessible to reviewers, a Homeland Security official testified Thursday.

Leon Rodriguez, director

of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, told members of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee that such checks aren't being done in an abundant manner, and he was not specific about when or how it would occur.

Lawmakers are trying to ascertain which safeguards are in place to ensure that extremists are not exploiting a variety of legal paths

to travel to the United States. At issue is how closely the U.S. government examines the backgrounds of people asking to come to the country, including reviewing their social media postings.

One of the San Bernardino, California, shooters came to the U.S. on a K-1 fiance visa last year despite the fact that the FBI believed she was already radicalized.



House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah presses Obama Administration officials from the State Department and Homeland Security on what safeguards are in place to ensure that would-be extremists are not exploiting a variety of legal paths to travel to the U.S., Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015, during a hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington.

(AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

Tashfeen Malik came to the U.S. on a K-1 fiance visa in July 2014 and passed multiple background checks and at least two in-person interviews, one in Pakistan and another after she married Syed Farook. Nonetheless, as the shooting attack that killed 14 people unfolded, a pledge of allegiance for Malik and Farook to the leader of the Islamic State group was posted on a Facebook page she maintained. The page was under an alias, and the pledge went undiscovered for a day. FBI Director James Comey said Malik and Farook communicated privately online about jihad and martyrdom before they married. Lawmakers at times angrily pressed officials on why even public social media wouldn't routinely be looked at for vetting those trying to enter the country. "If half the employers are doing it in the United States of America, if colleges are doing it for students, why wouldn't Homeland Security do it?" said Rep. Ste-

phen Lynch, D-Massachusetts. "We don't even look at their public stuff. That's what kills me."

DHS launched three pilot programs specifically aimed at reviewing social media postings as part of the immigration vetting process.

"There is less there that is actually of screening value than you would expect; at least in small early samples, some things seem more ambiguous than clear," Rodriguez told lawmakers Thursday. He said foreign alphabets frequently used in social media posts were a challenge to translate. Rodriguez raised the idea of adding social media reviews to all security procedures.

"We all continue to believe there's a potential for there to be information of screening value ... particularly in high risk environments," Rodriguez said, adding, "These security tools are ones we need to think about using across all our lines of business," not just refugee and K-1 visas. □

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Buyer of guns used in massacre charged with terrorism counts



Security is tight as a car carrying Enrique Marquez Jr. arrives at U.S. District Court in Riverside, Calif., Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015. Marquez, a longtime friend of Syed Rizwan Farook, the male shooter in the San Bernardino terrorist attack, was charged today with conspiring with Farook in 2011 and 2012 to commit crimes of terrorism, and with the unlawful purchase of two assault rifles used in the deadly shooting two weeks ago.

(AP Photo/Nick Ut)

**BRIAN MELLEY
ERIC TUCKER
Associated Press**

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The man who bought the assault rifles used by his friend in the San Bernardino massacre was charged Thursday with terrorism-related counts.

The FBI arrested Enrique Marquez, 24, on charges of conspiring with Syed Rizwan Farook to commit ter-

rorist attacks in 2011 and 2012 that they never carried out. Marquez was Farook's next-door neighbor and longtime friend who converted to Islam and was radicalized by Farook, federal prosecutors said. Marquez also was charged with illegally purchasing two assault rifles used by Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, to kill 14 people at a holiday gathering of Fa-

rook's health department co-workers on Dec. 2. The shooters died hours later in a gunbattle with police. Marquez had no role in the attack, but prosecutors said the guns and bomb-making materials he bought that the couple planned to detonate linked him to the killings. "While there currently is no evidence that Mr. Mar-

quez participated in the Dec. 2 attack or had advance knowledge of it, his prior purchase of the firearms and ongoing failure to warn authorities about Farook's intent to commit mass murder had fatal consequences," U.S. Attorney Eileen Decker said. Authorities previously said Marquez had legally purchased the high-powered guns. The FBI investigated the rampage as an act of terrorism and said the Muslim couple were radicalized before they met online and communicated privately about jihad and martyrdom before they married. President Barack Obama said he was briefed on the investigation Thursday and

reiterated the federal government's commitment to find answers to all the unknowns in the case. Marquez had deep ties with Farook that extended to a family connection. The two grew up next door to each other in Riverside and then became related through marriage. Both men were witnesses at the wedding of Farook's brother, Raheel, to a Russian woman in 2011, according to Riverside County marriage records. Last year, Marquez married the sister of Raheel Farook's wife.

That made Marquez and Raheel Farook brothers-in-law and gave Marquez and Syed Rizwan Farook a sister-in-law in common. □

Oklahoma: Two dead in suspected road rage shootings

ARAPAHO, Oklahoma (AP) — A man firing randomly from his pickup truck killed two people in separate shootings on an Oklahoma interstate, a local sheriff said. The suspected shooter surrendered early Thursday and was being held in a county jail. Custer County Sheriff Bruce Peoples said reports came in at about 11:50 p.m. Wednesday of a man firing at vehicles on Interstate 40 in Canadian County, which is adjacent to Oklahoma City.

The man apparently continued driving west, firing at vehicles as he drove fast and erratically, the sheriff said.

"He shot so many vehicles that it would have been totally impractical to assume

he knew them," Peoples said, describing the case as a suspected road rage incident.

A man was fatally shot in the Caddo County town of Hydro and a woman was killed 10 miles (16 kilometers) away in Weatherford, authorities said.

In both cases, the drivers were able to pull over to the shoulder of the road after the shooting, he said. The Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation identified the first victim as 45-year-old Jeffrey Kent Powell of Arapaho, who was traveling with his wife, who was not struck. The agency identified the second victim as 63-year-old Billie Jean West of Lone Wolf.

The suspect surrendered af-

ter a 25-mile (40-kilometer) chase shortly before 1 a.m. Thursday in Custer County, Peoples said. Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation spokeswoman Jessica Brown said the man was being held at the Custer County jail on a preliminary complaint of driving under the influence. More charges are likely.

Peoples said Thursday that authorities had not yet interviewed the suspect to determine a motive, but they don't suspect anyone was specifically targeted. At least two other vehicles were hit by gunfire but those drivers escaped injury, Brown said. She said it's early in the process but investigators believe the man picked his victims indiscriminately. □

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American Living:

New Orleans council votes to remove Confederate monuments



Quesada, of the Take 'em Down Coalition, leads a rally as confederate heritage supporters bear confederate flags nearby in front of City Hall in New Orleans.

(AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

CAIN BURDEAU

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — New Orleans' leaders on Thursday made a sweeping move to break with the city's Confederate past when the City Council voted to remove prominent monuments commemorating the pro-slavery South along some of its busiest

streets.

The council's 6-1 vote allows the city to remove four monuments, including a towering statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee that has stood at the center of a traffic circle for 131 years.

It was an emotional meeting — often interrupted by heckling — infused with ref-

erences to slavery, lynchings and racism, as well as the pleas of those who opposed removing the monuments to not "rewrite history."

City Council President Jason Williams called the vote a symbolic severing of an "umbilical cord" tying the city to the offensive legacy of racial hatred.

"If anybody wins here, it will be the South, because it is

finally rising," Williams, who is African-American, said.

Stacy Head, a council member at large, was the lone vote against the removal. She is one of two white council members.

She lamented what she called a rush to take the monuments down without adequate consideration of their historic value and meaning to many in New Orleans.

Fixing historic injustice is "a lot harder work than removing monuments," she said, even as many in the packed council chambers jeered her.

She said the issue was dividing the city, not uniting it. "I think all we will be left with is pain and division."

The decision came after months of impassioned debate. Now, the city faces possible lawsuits seeking to keep the monuments where they are.

Mayor Mitch Landrieu first proposed taking down these monuments after police said a white supremacist killed nine parishioners inside the African-American Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in June.

Anti-Confederate sentiment has grown since then around the country, along with protests against police mistreatment, as embodied by the Black Lives Matter movement.

Before Thursday's vote, Landrieu told the council and residents who gathered on both sides of the issue that for New Orleans to move forward, "we must reckon with our past."

Landrieu said the monuments reinforce the Confederate ideology of slavery, limit city progress and divide the city. He used President Abraham Lincoln's famous quote: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

The most imposing of the monuments the council has voted to strike from the cityscape has had a commanding position over St. Charles Avenue since 1884: A 16-foot (5-meter)-tall bronze statue of Lee stands atop a 60-foot (18-meter)-high Doric marble column, which itself rises over granite slabs on an earthen mound. Four sets of stone staircases, aligned with the major compass points, ascend the mound. □

Maine:

Indian tech company denies scamming consumers

DAVID SHARP

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) —

An Indian-based tech support company on Thursday denied accusations by the Washington state attorney general that it scammed consumers and said it remains interested in creating jobs in the U.S. after a partnership unraveled in Maine.

The company, iYogi, made a splash when it looked to the U.S. to create up to 300 jobs in partnership with a call center operator in Maine. The July announcement was big enough news that Gov. Paul LePage attended the event in Lewiston.

But it didn't take long for the deal to unravel.

Argo Marketing terminated the contract with iYogi in October and filed a lawsuit

for nonpayment this month. Only 30 people were hired in Lewiston.

"In business sometimes it's better to stop doing a certain contract relatively quickly before you keep going down a road that could lead to disaster," Argo CEO Jason Levesque said Thursday.

On Wednesday, a lawsuit in Washington state accused iYogi of scamming customers into buying software and services they didn't need. The attorney general said hundreds if not thousands of people had fallen for the scams in that state. Vishal Dhar, iYogi's president and co-founder, defended his company on Thursday, saying accusations that iYogi scammed consumers were "false and baseless."

He described the com-

pany's Maine venture as important for delivering "baseline metrics" and said the company aims to relaunch U.S. operations in the new year. "We chose Maine for its talent, and it still remains our first choice," he said in a statement.

The company bills itself as the world's largest independent technical support provider. With 5,000 workers in India, iYogi provides technical support via telephone and electronic communication — plus on-site help through 1,500 contract workers — for consumers who sign contracts with the company, the company said.

The lawsuit in Washington alleged deceptive business practices under the state Consumer Protection Act and Computer Spyware Statute. □



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US Financial Front:

Big break: Small businesses looking for annual tax deduction



Shawn Georgetti climbs out of his John Deere tractor on his 167-acre family dairy farm in Avella, Pa. Small businesses are close to getting a permanent half-million-dollar tax break when they buy equipment like cars, computers and machinery, but tax pros say owners should crunch some numbers before claiming the big deduction.

(AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar)

JOYCE M. ROSENBERG

AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) —

Small businesses are close to getting a permanent half-million-dollar tax break when they buy equipment like cars, computers and machinery. But tax pros say owners should crunch some numbers before claiming the big deduction.

An agreement that was reached in Congress this week and is expected to become law would give small companies a \$500,000 annual deduction for equipment purchases. The so-called Section 179 deduction has been in limbo the past few years, with Congress often not agree-

ing until December to raise it from the \$25,000 called for in the federal tax code. The permanent \$500,000 deduction is part of a tax package that also includes a higher deduction through 2019 for all companies that depreciate equipment purchases and a permanent break on research and development costs. Here's what you need to know:

WHAT IS THE SECTION 179 DEDUCTION?

The Section 179 deduction allows a small business to deduct upfront rather than depreciate over a number of years the cost of equipment like computers, ve-

hicles, manufacturing and farm machinery and office furniture. It can't be used for equipment like heating and air conditioning units that become part of a building.

Equipment has to be purchased and put into service by Dec. 31. So if you have a manufacturing machine delivered but it isn't assembled, up and running by the end of the year, you can't deduct it. You don't have to pay for the equipment by year-end; It's OK to buy it on credit and still take the full deduction.

If your company has lost money, you can carry over a portion of the deduction into the next year.

You can learn more about the deduction and how to

claim it on your tax return from IRS Publication 946, How to Depreciate Property, which is available on the IRS website, www.irs.gov. It's also a good idea to discuss your plans with an accountant or tax attorney.

HOW YOU SHOULD PROCEED?

Perhaps the greatest benefit of a permanent Section 179 deduction is that it allows businesses to do long-term financial planning. When accountants hold planning meetings with their business clients, they're often looking at revenue and income projections for three or four years, and they may even be looking back at the previous year.

So while it may be tempting to take the entire deduction in a given year, an accountant is likely to consider whether it makes more sense to depreciate a big purchase over a period of five to seven years so a company could save more money in the future, especially if it's likely to have a big revenue surge.

An owner whose income is down in the current year and isn't expecting a big tax bill might also want to think about delaying the purchase until the following year, says Jeffrey Berdahl, a certified public accountant with RLB Accountants in Allentown, Pennsylvania. "You might be in a higher tax bracket next year," Berdahl says. □



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Putin: Russia, US have narrowed their differences on Syria



Russian President Vladimir Putin gestures during his annual news conference in Moscow, Russia, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015. Putin was both cordial and coarse in his year-end news conference Thursday, saying the U.S. and Russia have narrowed their differences on Syria and share the same view of how to settle the conflict.

(AP Photo/Alexander Zemlianichenko)

V. ISACHENKOV
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — President Vladimir Putin was both cordial and coarse in his year-end news conference Thursday, saying the U.S. and Russia have narrowed their differences on Syria

and share the same view of how to settle the conflict. He reserved his crudest language for Turkey, suggesting that some leaders of the NATO ally may have wanted to "lick the Americans in some of their private parts" by shooting down a Russian

warplane on the Syrian border. That miscalculation by Turkey was now hurting its own interests, Putin said at his marathon meeting with Russian and foreign journalists. The Russian leader even gave a shoutout to Donald

Trump, calling the Republican presidential candidate a "very bright and talented man."

Speaking with emphasis and gesturing energetically throughout a news conference that lasted more than three hours and was televised live, Putin also vowed that the killing of a Russian opposition leader gunned down near the Kremlin in February will be solved and no one will be immune from prosecution. Putin said the Russian air campaign in Syria, which began Sept. 30, will continue until a political process begins, adding that Moscow would back the latest U.S. proposals for a peace process in the civil war.

Commenting on relations with Washington, Putin said that Russia backs a U.S.-drafted U.N. Security Council resolution on settling the crisis. The plan was presented by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry during his visit to Moscow earlier this week.

"In general, it suits us," Putin said. "I believe that the Syrian authorities should be OK with it, too."

He added that while the Syrian government "may not like some of it ... concessions must be made by both sides" to end the conflict that has killed more than 250,000 and turned millions into refugees since 2011. The Russian plan for settling the conflict "strangely as it may seem, coincides with the U.S. vision in its key aspects: joint work on a constitution, creation of instruments of control over future early elections, holding the vote and recognizing its results on the basis of that political process," Putin said.

"We will help settle this crisis in every possible way, and we will try to find solutions acceptable for all parties," he said. At the same time, he reaffirmed Russia's stance on the key issue dividing Russia and the West, the fate of Syrian President Bashar Assad, saying the Syrians themselves must determine who rules them. Putin said he was unsure whether to keep a per-

manent base in Syria, because Russia's new sea- and air-launched cruise missiles used recently in the country have given Moscow enough punch to strike from afar.

Addressing strained relations with Turkey, Putin said he "it's practically impossible" to overcome tensions with Ankara under its current leaders after it shot down a Russian bomber.

Turkey said the aircraft violated its airspace for 17 seconds despite repeated warnings, while Moscow insisted the plane had stayed in Syrian airspace.

Putin said that Russia was particularly annoyed because instead of apologizing over what he called Turkey's "hostile" action that killed one of the plane's two pilots and a Russian marine, the country turned to NATO for help.

The Russian leader said he had previously agreed to accommodate Turkey's concerns regarding Syria, adding that the Turkish leadership had never asked Russia to refrain from striking that specific area.

"Couldn't they just make a call or warn the military via the communications channels that existed and say: 'Look ... there are our interests here, so please don't hit it'?" Putin said.

"Did they think that we will run away? Russia isn't that kind of a country," he said.

"We only have increased our presence there."

Russia has sent more warplanes to a base in Syria and deployed long-range S-400 air defense missile systems there, he added, putting an end to what he called regular incursions by Turkish jets in Syrian airspace.

"Turkey had constantly violated Syria's airspace, but let them try to fly over there now," he added, menacingly.

Russia has introduced economic sanctions against Turkey, including a ban on the sale of tour packages that is estimated to cost the Turkish tourist industry billions of dollars a year.

Continued on page 27



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EU summit kicks off British reform talks in earnest

RAF CASERT
Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union leaders on Thursday sought to be accommodating to British demands to change the way the EU is run — but only if Prime Minister David Cameron doesn't seek to undermine core principles on which the 28-nation bloc is built.

Britain will have a referendum before the end of 2017 to decide whether to stay in the EU. Cameron is seeking wholesale changes to how the EU is managed and wants to ingrain it more with the British view of non-interference and sustained sovereignty rather than the EU's mantra of ever closer union.

Although many EU nations back British demands to cut red tape and streamline the bureaucracy in Brussels, they balk at suggestions to put barriers in

the face of the EU's cherished rules of near-unfettered travel across the bloc with equal rights for all. German Chancellor Angela Merkel assured Cameron he would have a friend in Germany in his quest to renegotiate fundamental parts of EU legislation if he colored within the lines of the EU treaty.

"On our side we would like to keep Britain as a member of the EU, but at the same time we do not want to limit the basic freedoms, nondiscrimination, the fundamental principles of the EU," Merkel said.

"I believe there should be possibilities to find solutions if all sides are willing to compromise," Merkel said of the upcoming negotiations with Britain.

Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary said in a joint statement they "consider the freedom of movement one of the fun-



British Prime Minister David Cameron, right, arrives for an EU summit in Brussels on Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015. European Union heads of state meet Thursday to discuss, among other issues, the current migration crisis and terrorism. (AP Photo/Geert Vanden Wijngaert)

damental values of the European Union" before adding that "we will not support any solutions which would be discriminatory or limit free movement."

If there is no fundamental reform, Cameron has indicated it could lead to

"Brexit," or a potential British exit.

British proposals on welfare and migration are expected to be the toughest to find an agreement on. Particularly grating on member states is a plan for a four-year ban on in-work

benefits for migrants, something many feel amounts to discrimination. Cameron has said the issue was not so much people coming to Britain as them getting access to the welfare system too easily under current EU rules. □

Sovereignty fears cloud EU debate over new border guard plan

LORNE COOK
Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union heavyweights France and Germany on Thursday backed a potentially divisive plan for a border guard agency with powers to unilaterally deploy to member states unable or unwilling to manage their borders.

The border and coast guard project is chiefly aimed at protecting Europe's external borders in countries like Greece and Italy as they struggle to manage the arrival of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing conflict or poverty for better lives in Europe. But the idea that

the agency could send ships, planes or other assets to a country even if it opposes the deployment is reviving old fears about a loss of national sovereignty to unelected officials at the EU's executive Commission in Brussels.

Countries further north in Europe like Germany and Sweden — the preferred destinations of many migrants — are keen to have tighter controls to ease the flow of people, as is France. "The external borders must be protected. I'm entirely in agreement with the proposal from the European Commission on a border guard," French President Francois Hollande told re-

porters at the EU summit in Brussels. German Chancellor Angela Merkel also underlined that she "very strongly supports" the plan. Before chairing the summit, European Council President Donald Tusk acknowledged that the border agency is a "most controversial idea" but said that passport-free travel in the 26-nation Schengen area would be compromised if Europe's outside borders are porous.

"Europe cannot remain vulnerable when Schengen states are not able to effectively protect their borders," Tusk said.

The new agency would have a standing reserve

force of at least 1,500 border guards that could be sent to EU border crossings within three days, rather than relying on time-consuming calls to nations for volunteers during emergencies.

But for some, the plan touches at the very heart of national identity — a country's right to decide who or what can be deployed on its territory — and Greece, Italy, Croatia and Hungary were expected to oppose it. A senior EU diplomat, briefing on condition of anonymity because the negotiations have not taken place yet, said it was unlikely that the European Commission would ever or-

der the border guard to a country that objected, as that would mean imposing an occupying army.

The proposal is just the start of a potentially long and divisive legislative process. Still, the EU has planned a 2016 budget for the agency of 238 million euros (\$260 million). According to the International Organization for Migration, more than 920,000 people have entered the EU so far this year. The influx has overwhelmed national border guards and reception capacities, notably in Greece, where some 770,000 migrants have arrived, most of them from Turkey. □



People stand in line at a money exchange house in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015. Argentina's currency sharply devalued against the U.S. dollar on Thursday as the new administration lifted deeply unpopular limits on the buying of foreign currencies.
(AP Photo/Victor R. Caivano)

Argentina: Devaluation of peso as dollar limits lifted

PETER PRENGAMAN

Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Argentina's currency sharply devalued against the U.S. dollar on Thursday as the new administration lifted deeply unpopular limits on the buying of foreign currencies, a major change that will expose Latin America's third largest economy to international market forces in ways not seen in over a decade.

The devaluation, widely expected by economists and even frequently hinted at by new President Mauricio Marci, could exacerbate already soaring prices and spook Argentines, who fear big changes to an economy that has suffered through periodic financial meltdowns.

Minutes after exchange houses and banks opened Thursday, the peso initially traded at around 15 to one U.S. dollar before dropping to 14.20 in the early after-

noon.

That represents a 31 percent drop in value from the 9.84 official rate at the close of business Wednesday. Over the last year, the government has kept the rate fixed around 9.

The change was put in motion Wednesday night, when Finance Minister Alfonso Prat-Gay announced there would no longer be restrictions on buying foreign currencies. Macri had campaigned on promises to lift the restrictions, saying they hurt businesses at home and scared away would-be international investors.

Attempting to stop capital flight, the preceding administration of President Cristina Fernandez instituted the restrictions on buying foreign currency in 2011. Locally called a "cepo," or "clamp," the restrictions were one of many protectionist policies instituted during 12 years of governments led by Fer-

nandez and her late husband and predecessor as president, Nestor Kirchner. People who wanted to buy dollars, a common practice in a South American country with a long history of financial collapses, had to meet several requirements. And most were limited to a few hundred dollars a month — when U.S. currency was available in banks. Businesses, especially those needing to deal in dollars, were deeply affected. While the Fernandez administration insisted that dollars coming into the country trade at the official rate, getting dollars out at that rate, if at all, proved difficult.

The result was an often baffling system of multiple official exchange rates. Industries from textiles to agriculture to commercial banks all had different rates, and businesses as well as individuals often traded in illegal exchange houses that were an open secret. □

Brazil: WhatsApp back online after temporarily block order

JENNY BARCHFIELD

Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — WhatsApp is back online in Brazil.

A Brazilian judge on Thursday struck down a lower court ruling that temporarily ordered telecoms to block the popular messaging service, snarling communications for many of its 100 million users in Brazil for about 12 hours.

The lower court in Sao Paulo state ordered WhatsApp blocked in connection to a criminal case because it wouldn't hand over user information.

Details were murky as the case is sealed, though local media reported it concerned an investigation into Brazil's most powerful drug gang.

But Thursday afternoon, state judge Xavier de Souza overruled the lower court, saying in a statement that "in light of constitutional principles, it doesn't seem reasonable that millions of users are affected because of the inaction of the corporation" to hand over information to the court.

Mark Zuckerberg, who heads WhatsApp's parent company Facebook, said in a Facebook post that the case was related to the company's attempt to guard customers' data.

"I am stunned that our efforts to protect people's data would result in such an extreme decision by a single judge to punish every person in Brazil who uses WhatsApp," Zuckerberg wrote in his Facebook post.

"Until today, Brazil has been an ally in creating an open Internet," he added. "Brazilians have always been among the most passionate in sharing their voice online."

Brazil's biggest telecoms put up scant fight against the judicial order.

For months they have complained about WhatsApp, saying that they lose revenue because clients use its free services instead of using the phone companies' own text messaging. But the association representing the cellphone industry, SindiTelebrasil, denied in a statement those companies were the plaintiffs in the case.

Brazilians are among the globe's most voracious users of social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter. Many quickly migrated to WhatsApp's competitors. Viber said usage in the Brazilian market had grown by 2,000 percent in 12 hours, while the messaging service Telegram said over 1.5 million new Brazilian clients started using it Thursday.

Technology companies often run into roadblocks in Brazil's complicated legal system, where single judges have in the past tried to block Facebook, Google and other services for various reasons, such as failure to remove offensive posts or not handing over user information for investigations.

However, Thursday's block of WhatsApp appeared to be the first time a major online service was blocked nationwide. □



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US-Cuba aviation deal allows 110 scheduled flights a day

M. WEISSENSTEIN
 Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — The United States and Cuba have struck a deal to allow as many as 110 regular airline flights a day, allowing a surge of American travel to Cuba that could eventually flood the island with hundreds of thousands more U.S. visitors a year, officials said Thursday on the anniversary of detente between the Cold War foes. The deal reached Wednesday night after three days of talks in Washington opens the way for U.S. airlines to negotiate with Cuba's government for 20 routes a day to Havana and 10 to each of Cuba's other nine major airports, the State Department said. While it will likely take months before the first commercial flight to Havana, the reestablishment of regular aviation to Cuba after half a century will almost certainly be the biggest business development since the two countries began normalizing relations last year.

Even a fraction of the newly allowed number of flights would more than double current U.S. air traffic to Cuba but it may take years to reach that number. U.S. travel to Cuba has risen by more than 50 percent this year alongside an even great surge in travel from other countries, overwhelming the country's outmoded tourist infrastructure. Havana's international airport is barely able to accommodate current demand for flights into the city and virtually every hotel is booked well into next year. It seems almost certain that Cuban officials will allow new U.S. flights slowly in order to make sure the government can handle

the increase in travel.

The United States and Cuba publicly say they're delighted with the state of diplomatic relations a year after Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro declared the end to more than 50 years of official hostility. The two countries have reopened embassies in Havana and Washington; agreed to a pilot program restarting direct mail service; signed two deals on environmental protection; and launched talks on issues from human rights to compensation for U.S. properties confiscated by Cuba's revolution.

"We are advancing our shared interests and working together on complex issues that for too long defined and divided us," Obama said in a statement issued Thursday.

"Meanwhile, the United States is in a stronger position to engage the people and governments of our hemisphere," he added. "Congress can support a better life for the Cuban people by lifting an embargo that is a legacy of a failed policy."

The U.S. secretaries of state, commerce and agriculture and the Cuban-born deputy secretary of homeland security have all made official visits to start discussions on unsexy but vital technical matters like produce inspection and port regulations.

Sports and cultural activity is heating up too. Havana has been swamped by U.S. celebrities. Music promoters are jostling to hold a U.S. pop concert in the capital early next year. Major League Baseball stars including Cuban-born defectors Yasiel Puig and Jose Abreu were warmly welcomed by the Cuban government this week on



Backdropped by pictures of Cuba's President Raul Castro, former Cuban leader Fidel Castro, center, and rebel leader Ernesto Che Guevara, Josefina Vidal, director general of the U.S. division at Cuba's Foreign Ministry, speaks to reporters next to Gustavo Machin, left, Cuba's deputy chief of North American affairs in Havana, Cuba. The United States and Cuba have struck a deal to allow as many as 110 regular airline flights a day. (AP Photo/Desmond Boylan)

a goodwill trip meant to pave the way for spring training games in Cuba in

2016.

But until this week there has been virtually no progress

on business ties, a major part of Obama's new policy on Cuba. □

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Haiti leader forms commission to evaluate elections

DAVID McFADDEN
Associated Press
PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti
(AP) — Haitian President

next three days and then make recommendations to the Provisional Electoral Council and his govern-

question. The No. 2 finisher, Jude Celestin, has called the officially announced re-

in the initial round of presidential voting behind Martelly's pick, political newcomer Jovenel Moise. But the council that oversees the electoral process has rejected the demands, insisting it lacks authority to authorize any review of the results and saying the Dec. 27 date was firm. Celestin, who has not been campaigning for the runoff, could not immediately be reached for his response to Martelly's decree. It was not clear how the members of the evaluation commission were chosen or what the precise scope of their review would be. Martelly said his "commission of evaluation" would be tasked with recommending measures to "ensure transparency and credibility of the electoral process."

The panel includes Patrick Aris of the Episcopal Conference of Haiti, which has been sharply critical of this year's elections, as well as Rosny Desroches, director of a Haitian observer group, and former Port-au-Prince Mayor Joseph Emmanuel Charlemagne. The two presidential candidates expected to compete in the runoff could have a representative monitor the commission's work, according to the presidential decree. □



Demonstrators chant anti-electoral council slogans during a protest against the country's electoral council to mark the 25th anniversary of first democratic election in 1990, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2015.
(AP Photo/Dieu Nalio Chery)

Michel Martelly on Thursday ordered creation of a special commission to assess the country's electoral process ahead of a scheduled Dec. 27 presidential and legislative runoff that opposition factions have threatened to derail because of deep suspicions of fraud. Martelly, who has been ruling by decree since January, named five members to assess the electoral process over the

ment. He said they would have assistance from experts from the European Union and observers from the Organization of American States. A broad array of rights groups, local election monitors and political factions has alleged that the Oct. 25 presidential and legislative elections were so badly marred by ballot tampering, multiple voting and other irregularities that their validity was in

sults a "ridiculous farce" and suggested he would boycott a runoff with the government-backed candidate who finished first unless a proper review of the elections was done and changes were made to the electoral council and police. Celestin has not been campaigning in recent weeks, but hasn't withdrawn from the runoff. The former state construction chief finished second

Colombia Supreme Court absolves army colonel in 1985 raid

LIBARDO CARDONA
Associated Press
BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) —

Colombia's Supreme Court on Wednesday threw out the conviction of an outspoken army colonel who had been found guilty of forcibly "disappearing" several people taken alive during a 1985 army raid on the high court after it was seized by guerrillas.

On a 5-3 vote, justices ruled there wasn't sufficient evidence that now retired Col. Alfonso Plazas was responsible for the disappearance of two people — a rebel and a cafeteria worker — who were escorted alive from the building during the 48-hour standoff and never seen again.

President Juan Manuel Santos this year apologized for the deadly siege in compliance with an Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruling that condemned the government for the disappearance of 12 people. Authorities recently located in a government warehouse and a potter's cemetery in Bogota the remains of three people who were shown on video being escorted alive from the court building.

Plazas, who has been held the past eight years in a military barracks, has always maintained his innocence and stuck by his controversial declaration at the time of the assault that he was defending democracy.

"With this ruling, the Colombian justice system is redeeming itself," Plazas told Caracol TV upon learning of the decision. "I want my children to know that their father fought for Colombia." □

Costa Rica detains suspect in killing of US woman

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (AP) — A suspect has been arrested in the killing of a U.S. social worker found stabbed to death at a hotel in this Central American capital, authorities said this week. The 27-year-old suspect was identified only by his two surnames, Obando

Vega. The Costa Rican Public Ministry told The Associated Press that the man was apparently involved in a romantic relationship with Sondra Lynn Elizondo, a Minnesota native who was living in Florida. Elizondo worked for Vida Volunteer of Merritt island,

Florida, which organizes volunteer medical and veterinary missions in Central America. She traveled frequently to Costa Rica and most recently entered the country Dec. 5. Elizondo was found dead with multiple stab wounds last week in San Jose. The Public Ministry said

Obando Vega was detained Dec. 10 at a supermarket in a northern district of the capital. Later, accompanied by a defense lawyer, he declined to make a statement. He was ordered to remain behind bars for six months while authorities investigate. □



Loyal Visitors Honored at the Divi Phoenix Beach Resort



PALM BEACH - Recently the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure of honoring a group of loyal and friendly visitors of Aruba at the Divi Phoenix Beach

Resort as Distinguished Visitors and Goodwill Ambassadors. The symbolic honorary titles are presented in the name of the Minister of Tourism as tokens of appreciation to guests who visit Aruba for 10-to-19 and 20-34 consecutive years.

The honorees were Mr. Lester Streeter of Massachusetts, Mr. Elwood and Mrs. Fran Streeter of Massachusetts, Mr. Robert and Mrs. Ann Maccini of New Hampshire, Mr. John and Mrs. Diane Gilbert of Pennsylvania, Mr. Phil and Mrs. Patricia Senneway of Pennsylvania, Mr. Fred and Mr. Dale Kladder of Indiana, and Mr. Daniel and Mrs.

Deborah Delorenzo of New Jersey. All of the honorees are loyal guests of the Divi Phoenix and they love Aruba very much because of the friendly people, the weather, the beaches, the restaurants, the Casinos, and just about everything else! They say Aruba feels like a second home where the people are like family to them, and the Divi Phoenix is truly their 'home-away-from-home.'

The certificates were presented by Ms. Marouska Heyliger representing the Aruba Tourism Authority together with family and friends from the Divi Phoenix. □



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The honorees were Mr. David and Mrs. Sandra Hubbard of Virginia.

David and Sandra are loy-



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al guests of the Manchebo Beach Resort and they love Aruba very much because of the friendly people, the weather, the beaches, the restaurants, the Casinos, and just about everything else! They say Aruba feels like a second home where the people are like family

to them, and the Manchebo Beach Resort is truly their 'home-away-from-home.' The certificates were presented by Ms. Marouska Heyliger representing the Aruba Tourism Authority together with Carla and GM Edgar Roeloff from the Manchebo Beach Resort.

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ORANJESTAD - We would like to introduce Aramis to you, one of the donkeys that has found a home at the Aruba Donkey Sanctuary. We have never seen a donkey that was so easily accepted by the herd as Aramis. Normally it takes quite a while before the herd accepts a newcomer, but with Aramis and his friend Ninja it went without a hitch. We only separated them for one night, but one noticed that the herd was not opposed to this gorgeous, dark grey donkey. So put into the herd, and loving every moment at the Aruba Donkey Sanctuary. Aramis can look forward to staying a long, long time with us, as he is just four years old. This beautiful donkey has been provided with a chip, just like all the other donkeys. On the chip is information about the donkey and its medical

history. The donkeys at the sanctuary have a lot of friends with whom they can play all day long. And they love living there: they



are well-cared for, they are fed and watered and when they are sick the vet is called. Yes, they are ex-

pensive customers for the sanctuary.

The volunteers are trying to cover the various costs with all kinds of activities and

a donkey, who buy something at the donkey shop or who make a donation. Thus they help support us. Everyone is welcome to

fil 3. Entry is free of charge and one can enjoy a soft drink, a cup of coffee or a refreshing ice cream.

The volunteers of the sanctuary are hoping that somebody will adopt this friendly, lovely donkey. Of course the donkey will keep on living at the sanctuary; you only need to pay AWG. 30,- per month for the donkey's keep. With this amount you help support the sanctuary as well as your own donkey. And you will receive a beautiful certificate and a super T-shirt and your name and photo will be posted on our website. So please call the sanctuary at 593-2933; you can also register via the website www.arubandonkey.org or donate money on bank account number 40.03.025 at the Aruba Bank! Just do it! Would you like to follow the donkeys on Facebook: surf to Donkey Sanctuary Aruba please. □

the sale of great donkey memorabilia in the shop. Fortunately, there are also visitors who wish to adopt

visit the sanctuary, which has opening hours from 9 am until 4 pm and in the weekend from 10 am un-

Enjoy Aruba's One and Only Ice Rink at Taste of Belgium!

PALM BEACH - Taste of Belgium is the home of Aruba's one and only ice rink during the holiday season! This December month will be celebrated in winter style with outdoor ice skating and plenty of holiday season events. Taste of Belgium is thrilled to be the home of the ice skating rink in the heart of the High rise hotel area. The Ice Rink is part of Taste of Belgium's holiday season theme and it offers a unique setting to celebrate the season in a cosy winter style under the sun. Taste of Belgium is located at the Palm Beach Plaza shopping center, and it is truly a perfect place to enjoy the magic of the season with your family, friends, colleagues,



or romantic dates. The charming x-mas decorations and festive lights add on to that special season's spirit that we all treasure. Ice angels are invited to skate 15 minutes for only 5

AFL per skater (skate rental included). For a group of 10 or more people (max. 20), some cool group discounts are available for all this frigid fun. If you are interested in bringing your

whole party to celebrate birthdays, special events, private parties or corporate holiday gatherings, the rink is available at exclusive rental packages. Holiday music, games, car-

olers and so much more will flurry around you as you enjoy ice-skating on Aruba! Enjoy the traditional pea soup, hot chocolate milk, tasty cheese fondue, specialty wines, Belgian beers and much more goodies that will complete your perfect season's feel. To avoid any ice avalanche of skaters at the rink, it is suggested you make advance reservations for your private party or group events.

Skaters of all ages and skill levels are invited to chill out as they glide, spin and turn at the ice rink, open daily from 4pm – 10pm.

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www.tasteofbelgium.aw □

Kukoo Kunuku Serves Up Fun and Laughter in Aruba!

PALM BEACH - Born out of the dreams of a couple who escaped south for the winter and never left, Kukoo Kunuku is the place on Aruba to find great food and make fun memories with the people around you. Kukoo Kunuku offers party bus tours and other adventures that take guests on a whirlwind tour of some of Aruba's best sites as well as fun places where they can relax and grab a drink. Kukoo Kunuku is staffed by an eclectic mix of val-

ued employees as diverse and interesting as Aruba itself. Their motto speaks for itself and is echoed by the experiences of taking a tour with them-"The perfect way for the old and the reckless and the young and the restless to spend an evening in Paradise." Aruba's latest dinner under the stars location, Casibari Grill, is now featured on the Kukoo Kunuku Dinner and Barhopping Tour. Kukoo Kunuku guests can now enjoy a great local BBQ meal with all the trimmings



before embarking on a fun barhopping and night-life adventure. The newly renovated Casibari, is now open to the public seven days a week serving delicious drinks and an exciting array of menu options. It is full of character with an atmosphere that can't be

beat anywhere else on the island!

Take the opportunity to dance, drink, talk, and enjoy the music at Casibari Grill when you stop by on a Kukoo Kunuku tour the next time you are in Aruba. More information and reviews of Kukoo Kunuku can

be found on TripAdvisor- it comes highly recommended from travelers all around the world!

For more information or to make reservations, please contact the Kukoo Kunuku at (297) 586-2010 or visit the website www.kukookunuku.com! □

Chelsea Fires Mourinho Over 'Palpable Discord' With Players

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Vonn Goes Fastest in World Cup Downhill Training

Lindsey Vonn of the United States is airborne during a women's World Cup downhill training in Val d'Isère, France, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015.

(AP Photo/Pier Marco Tacca)

JEROME PUGMIRE

AP Sports Writer

VAL D'ISERE, France (AP) —

Lindsey Vonn was on such good form when posting the fastest time in a downhill training run on Thursday that she eased up before the line.

The Oreiller Killy course at the French Alpine resort of Val d'Isère has long been one of the former Olympic champion's favorites — and it showed.

Despite standing up out of her tuck position and dropping her arms for the final few meters, she placed .32 seconds ahead of Swiss skier Lara Gut and .89 clear of Tina Weirather of Liech-

tenstein.

"I just like going fast, I love my job," a smiling Vonn said at the finish.

She has good reason to smile, having won four races already this season to extend her women's record to 71.

Next up is a World Cup super-combined on Friday — downhill and then slalom — followed by Saturday's downhill, where she will be odds-on favorite.

"I'm not unbeatable," said the 31-year-old American, who won last year's downhill at Val d'Isère.

Vonn is chasing a fifth overall World Cup title and first since 2012 — before her

career was threatened by two knee operations in the aftermath of her crash at the 2013 world championships.

"Karma comes back in the end, if you work hard," she said. "I had a really good feeling when I was training at home in Vail (Colorado) with some of the Austrian men and some of the American men. Usually if I'm on the same page as the men I have a good season."

Winning two downhills and a Super-G at Lake Louise and a giant slalom last weekend in the Swedish resort of Are shows that she is very much on track.

Gut, her most dangerous rival because she's doing all five disciplines, is already 128 points behind.

There appears little other competition, with longtime rival Tina Maze taking the year off and defending overall champion Anna Fenninger facing a year out with a knee injury.

When Vonn won a downhill in Val d'Isère 10 years ago to the day, she was presented with a cow.

"I remember the weather being really bad and Janica (Kostelic) was trying to make me nervous," Vonn said. "But I knew there was a cow in the finish and that's what I wanted to

win."

Vonn recounts how Kostelic tried — and failed — to put her off with mind games.

"It was like a blizzard and she was like 'Oh, I don't know if we're going to race, I don't know if I'm going to race, maybe you shouldn't race,'" Vonn said. "(But) I was too smart for that."

Vonn won downhill again at Val d'Isère in 2006 and 2010, adding super-combi wins in 2009 and 2010.

But another win in Friday's super-combi could prove complicated considering that her previous slalom win was six years ago.

Continued on Page 18

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Vonn Goes Fastest in World Cup Downhill Training

Continued from Page 17

"I'm 1,000 percent winging it," Vonn said. Vonn had waited several minutes before racing after watching fellow American Stacey Cook crash spectacularly into the safety netting. "I just got a bit of unexpected air," Cook told The Associated Press. "I was going quite a bit faster and didn't realize that would have as much effect as it did." Cook was unharmed, but it took safety workers several minutes to free her

from the meshing.

"I literally could not even move my head in the fence, I was so stuck, couldn't move at all," she said. "They couldn't get my skis off because I was too far away from them. So it was like a little fly trap." Yet Cook says such crashes can have a positive effect. "Sometimes it can actually give you confidence that you can crash so hard and actually still be fine," she said. "A weird kind of confidence that you can (push) it a little bit more." □

Lara Gut of Switzerland is airborne during a women's World Cup downhill training in Val d'Iserre, France, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015.

(AP Photo/Pier Marco Tacca)



Norway, US dominate Val Gardena downhill training

United States's Steven Nyman is airborne during a training session for a men's World Cup downhill in Val Gardena, Italy, Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015.

(AP Photo/Shinichiro Tanaka)

VAL GARDENA, Italy (AP) — Aksel Lund Svindal led the way again as Norway and the United States claimed the top four spots in the final training session on Thursday for the classic World Cup downhill on the Saslong course. Svindal enjoyed a 0.24 seconds advantage over Norwegian teammate Kjetil Jansrud.

Aiming to tie the record with his fourth win in this race, Steven Nyman stood third, with fellow American Travis Ganong fourth.

Wiley Maple, another American, clocked the fifth fastest time but he missed a gate.

Svindal, the two-time overall World Cup champion, has won three super-Gs on the Saslong but never the downhill. He also led the opening training session on Wednesday.

A super-G is scheduled for Friday followed by the downhill on Saturday. □

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US celebrates Wambach's final game, but falls 1-0 to China

BRETT MARTEL
AP Sports Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Abby Wambach walked off the field for the final time like a rock star — mic drop and all.

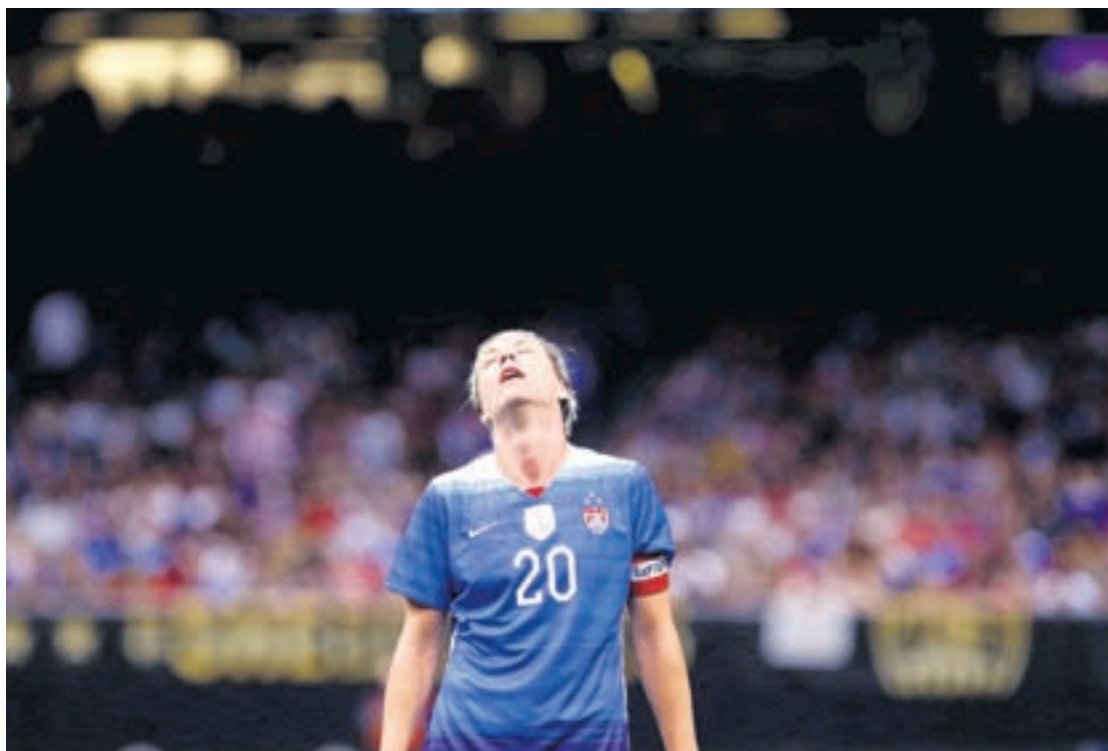
It sounded as if she was ready to party like one, too. She wasn't able to leave with a victory in her final game with the U.S. national team. China's 1-0 win on Wednesday night — the U.S. team's first home loss in more than a decade — wasn't going to diminish the triumphant nature of Wambach's extraordinary career.

"Tonight is a celebration," Wambach asserted. "The result, obviously, is annoying. It would be better if we had won, but the reality is I played in so many games. This result doesn't shape or determine or define my career."

Wambach said her teammates apologized profusely to her afterward, but she told them, "There's nothing to be sorry about. Today wasn't about getting a result."

Wambach played into the 72nd minute, managing two threatening headers and a shot on goal from inside the penalty area before subbing out of a match for the final time.

"It's kind of symbolic; I get 70 minutes and we don't score a goal," Wambach said, alluding to why it's time for her, at 35, to retire. The career scoring leader in international play — for men and women, with 184 goals — kicked off her cleats and hugged each teammate on the field before walking to the bench,



U.S. forward Abby Wambach reacts during the first half of an international friendly soccer match against China in New Orleans, Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2015. Wambach was playing in her final international match.

(AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

smiling, to embrace her coaches and remaining teammates as the crowd chanted her name.

"I love this team," Wambach said in comments delivered on the field to fans after the game. "It has been my pleasure and my honor to represent you all, the fans, for as long as I've been able to. ... The future is so bright.

These women are going to kill it."

And she made it clear that, despite the loss, it was time to celebrate, saying, "Bourbon Street, watch out," before dropping the microphone and walking off alone as her teammates waited behind, applauding with the rest of the crowd.

China scored in the 58th minute, when forward Wang Shuang volleyed in a bounding cross from Wang

Shanshan.

The U.S., which won the Women's World Cup this summer, had gone 104 home games without losing since falling to Denmark in 2004.

Kristine Lilly and Mia Hamm started that 3-1 loss Denmark in Philadelphia, while Wambach came in as a sub. The U.S. women had gone 91-0-13 since.

The Americans nearly tied China in the 87th minute when Lindsey Horan beat goalkeeper Zhao Lina, but Horan was ruled just a step offside when she received the pass from Christen Press. That was the closest of several near misses.

Horan's header forced a diving save by Lina in the 82nd minute. In the 84th minute, Carli Lloyd's pass sent Press into the penalty area for a hard drive from

the left side. But Press, who had subbed in for Wambach, shot it right at Lina. In added time, Emily Sonnett's header went just over the cross bar.

The game wrapped up the U.S.'s nine-game "Victory Tour" in which it went 7-1-1, outscoring opponents 40-3. Wambach got her 10th start of the year in her send-off game and also was designated the captain.

It was apparent from the outset that the Americans' plan of attack was based in part on sending high crosses into the penalty area in hopes of connecting with Wambach for one of her trademark headers. She put two headers toward goal in the first 2 minutes, but both were blocked away by defenders.

"We really wanted to get her a goal. She did well,

had a few chances," Lloyd said. "It's unfortunate to lose the match but at the same time this is a celebration of Abby and what she's done for the team and I think that's what matters."

In the 30th minute, Wambach was able to sidestep a defender and attempt a lunging toe-poke from about 10 yards out, but couldn't muster the power or placement to beat Lina. Some of the greats in women's soccer were drawn to the Superdome for Wambach's 255th game with the national team, including Hamm and Brandi Chastain, who starred on the 1999 World Cup-winning squad.

A festive crowd of nearly 33,000 acknowledged Wambach at seemingly every opportunity.

U.S. Soccer Federation banners lining field-level walls and covering the tunnels to the locker rooms read, "Only one Abby." And when the teams took the field shortly before kickoff, fans along the sideline held up yellow and black cards with the same slogan.

Before the starting lineups were announced, the USSF presented Wambach with a rendering of her famous, tying goal on a header against Brazil in the 2011 World Cup. Just below the image was the word, "POWER." U.S. coach Jill Ellis expressed confidence that the younger players for which Wambach paved the way will step up to fill the void as the team prepares to qualify for next summer's Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. □



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Chelsea fires Mourinho over 'palpable discord' with players

ROB HARRIS
AP Sports Writer

LONDON (AP) — Jose Mourinho's "palpable discord" with Chelsea players

came 2 1/2 years after his return to Stamford Bridge and only four months into a new four-year contract signed after winning his

Abramovich decided he could not risk keeping the fans' favorite in the dug-out as the mid-way point of the season approaches

the club, the fact of the matter remains that Chelsea Football Club is in trouble.

"The results are not good. There obviously seemed to be a palpable discord between manager and players. And we feel it was time to act. The owner is forced to make what was a very tough decision for the good of the club."

The worst-ever start for a defending champion team in the Premier League was compounded on Monday by a 2-1 loss at surprise leader Leicester. After the match, Mourinho said he was "betrayed" by his players — exposing a dressing room rift.

"This is essentially the same group of players who won the league and the League Cup last season. They did in style and they did it by showing commitment and by sweating tears and blood for the club when needed," Emenalo said in a Chelsea website interview.

"The players have a responsibility to go out and prove everybody wrong and show a certain level of commitment ... to try to get the club up the league table."

The personal conduct of

the self-styled "Special One" was also proving damaging to Chelsea, with Mourinho engaging in public spats with referees, a television rights holder and even the club's doctor over the last year. Chelsea is engaged in an ongoing legal battle with Dr. Eva Carneiro after she was publicly criticized and then demoted following Mourinho's opening-day outburst.

Now it is Mourinho leaving Chelsea, with Russian billionaire Abramovich preparing for his 10th managerial appointment since buying the team in 2003 and transforming its fortunes with a huge injection of cash.

Emenalo indicated that one of the "quality coaches embedded" at Chelsea would be in temporary charge for Saturday's home match against Sunderland, with the club "working vigorously and actively" to appoint Mourinho's successor.

First hired by Chelsea in 2004, the Portuguese ended a 50-year league title drought and defended the trophy among other successes before losing a power struggle three years later with Abramovich. □



Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho waves to fans at Stamford Bridge Stadium in London. Mourinho's "palpable discord" with Chelsea players forced the club to abruptly end his second spell as manager on Thursday with the team languishing just above the relegation zone only seven months after winning the Premier League. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

forced the club to abruptly end his second spell as manager on Thursday with the team languishing just above the relegation zone only seven months after winning the Premier League.

Mourinho's departure

third league title with Chelsea.

Despite a succession of humiliating results, the 52-year-old coach had been defiantly insisting he was the right man to oversee the team.

But Chelsea owner Roman

with Chelsea only a point above the relegation zone.

"It was a decision taken to protect the interests of the club," Chelsea technical director Michael Emenalo said. "Whilst there is huge sentiment for the individual who has done so much for

AC Milan through to Cup quarters with 2-0 win over Sampdoria

DANIELLA MATAR
Associated Press

MILAN (AP) — AC Milan is through to the Italian Cup quarterfinals after winning 2-0 at 10-man Sampdoria, Rossoneri coach Sinisa Mihajlovic's former team. M'Baye Niang broke the deadlock five minutes after the break, beating the offside trap to run onto Carlos Bacca's through-ball and fire into the bottom left corner. Bacca sealed the result

in stoppage time, thanks to an assist from Keisuke Honda, after Samp had missed clearcut chances to level.

Sampdoria's hopes of a comeback started to fade when defender Ervin Zukanovic was dismissed in the 64th minute for picking up two yellow cards in a matter of seconds — having said something to the referee, moments after being booked for a foul. Milan will fancy its chances

of reaching the final. If it beats relegation-threatened Carpi, it will face the winner of the match between the two lower-division sides left in the competition — Alessandria and Spezia. Earlier, Lazio came from behind to beat 10-man Udinese 2-1 to book a quarterfinal tie against Juventus — a rematch of last season's final.

Udinese scored a stunning opener in the 67th minute. Panagiotis Kone flicked up Giovanni Pasquale's cross from the left before swiveling and volleying into the far top corner. The visitors' lead lasted just three minutes before Alessandro Matri levelled with Udinese down to 10 men after substitute Rodrigo Aguirre had left the pitch for treatment on an injury — shortly after coming off the bench. Aguirre tried to play on but had to admit defeat, leaving Udinese at a numerical disadvantage for the rest of the match as its three substitutions had already been made. Lazio scored the winner 11 minutes from time. Udinese's 18-year-old goalkeeper Alex Meret did well to deny Abdoulay Konko but could do nothing about Danilo Cataldi's header from point-blank range — although the Lazio midfielder appeared to be offside. □

NBA Roundup:

Thompson's 27-point third quarter leads Warriors past Suns



Golden State Warriors' Klay Thompson, right, shoots over Phoenix Suns' Jon Leuer during the first half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2015, in Oakland, Calif. (AP Photo/Ben Margot)

OAKLAND, California (AP) — Klay Thompson scored 27 of his season-high 43 points in the third quarter as the Golden State Warriors responded to their first loss after a 24-0 start by beating the Phoenix Suns 128-103 on Wednesday night. Stephen Curry added 25 points on 10-of-14 shooting and seven assists as Golden State returned home

from its two-week trip that ended with its lone defeat, 108-95 on Saturday night at Milwaukee. That also ended a 28-game overall winning streak by the Warriors, second-longest in NBA history. Draymond Green had 16 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists for his fourth triple-double this season. Mirza Teletovic scored 24 points off the bench to

lead the Suns, whose poor showing sent the sellout crowd to the exits midway through the fourth. San Antonio's Kawhi Leonard scored 27 points as the Spurs set a club record with their 23rd straight home victory, rolling past the Washington Wizards 114-95. LaMarcus Aldridge added 14 points and Manu Ginobili and Patty Mills each had 11 for San Antonio. The Spurs are 14-0 at home and 22-5 overall. John Wall and Marcin Gortat had 20 points each for the Wizards. In New York, Dwyane Wade scored 10 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter, and Hassan Whiteside had 20 points and 13 rebounds to help the Miami Heat beat the Brooklyn Nets 104-

98. Goran Dragic added 16 points, Gerald Green had 13 and Justise Winslow 11 for Miami in the Heat's third straight victory. Brook Lopez scored 25 points, and Jarrett Jack had 22 points and 10 assists for the Nets. They dropped the final three games of their six-game homestand. The Los Angeles Clippers overcame center DeAndre Jordan's ejection to down the Milwaukee Bucks 103-90 after Chris Paul had 21 points and eight assists. Jordan had nine points and eight rebounds in 18 minutes. He left with 6:49 remaining in the third after getting a pair technical fouls from referee Marc Davis with the Clippers leading 66-52. The calls stemmed from a battle over a loose

ball with Bucks guard Michael Carter-Williams. Carmelo Anthony had 20 points, 15 rebounds and nine assists for the Knicks and Arron Afflalo scored 29 points as New York beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 107-102. Kristaps Porzingis had 11 points, six rebounds, six blocks and three assists for the Knicks in his first matchup against fellow rookie and No. 1 pick Karl-Anthony Towns. Oklahoma City's Kevin Durant scored 24 points to lead the Thunder past the Portland Trail Blazers 106-90 for their sixth straight victory, while Jimmy Butler scored 24 points and Derrick Rose added 19 as the Chicago Bulls beat the Memphis Grizzlies 98-85. □

Rask, Bruins blank Penguins 3-0

BOSTON (AP) — Tuukka Rask stopped 34 shots for his fourth shutout of the season and Jimmy Hayes ended a 15-game goal drought as the Boston Bruins beat Pittsburgh 3-0 on Wednesday, keeping new Penguins coach Mike Sullivan winless after his first two games. Max Talbot and Ryan Spooner also scored, while Finland's Rask got his 30th career shutout. Pittsburgh backup goalie Jeff Zatkoff had 26 saves as the Penguins lost for the seventh time in nine games (2-4-3).

Sullivan replaced fired coach Mike Johnston on Saturday, and Pittsburgh lost 4-1 to Washington in his debut Monday night. In the day's other game, Braden Holtby made 26 saves to help the Washington Capitals to a 2-1 home win over the Ottawa Senators. Holtby lowered his NHL-best goals-against average to 1.83. He has allowed three goals in his last three games, making 35 saves in a 2-1 victory at Tampa Bay on Saturday night and 44 in Monday's victory over Pittsburgh. □

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'Concussion' movie subject exaggerated role, researchers say

JIMMY GOLEN
AP Sports Writer

BOSTON (AP) — In the trailer for the movie "Concussion," star Will Smith says: "I found a disease that no one has ever seen." It's a claim the real-life doctor portrayed by Smith, forensic pathologist Bennet Omalu, has himself made

versity Hospital in Glasgow, Scotland. "Chronic traumatic encephalopathy has been around for decades. It's not a new term," Stewart said. "The only thing I would say that Bennet has done is that he identified it in an American footballer." In a telephone call to the

ing to undermine Dr. Omalu's work," Sony Pictures spokeswoman Jean Guerin said. "What is beyond dispute is that Dr. Omalu's discovery shined a light on a reality that the NFL ignored for too long and continues to play out every Sunday." With its marquee star and holiday release, "Concus-

a disease, and what it is to name it. In a 2013 talk that is viewable on YouTube, Omalu claims he came up with the name CTE after discovering the disease in Webster's brain: "I said to myself ... you need to give it a name. You need to give it a sexy name. You need to give it

name for decades. Originally studied in boxers in the 1920s as dementia pugilistica, the seminal work on the disease came from British neurologist Macdonald Critchley, who in 1949 wrote a paper entitled: "Punch-drunk syndromes: the chronic traumatic encephalopathy of boxers." By Webster's death on Sept. 24, 2002, the disease had been diagnosed not just in individual boxers but in rugby and soccer players, epileptics and others with illnesses that resulted in head-banging, and an alcoholic circus clown who was knocked unconscious a dozen times as the subject of a dwarf-tossing routine. "(Omalu) must know that this pathology existed for many decades before," Stewart said. "Otherwise he wouldn't know what to be looking for." Asked to specify precisely what his discovery was, Omalu told the AP: "The pathology of CTE in a football player had not been known before I described this disease." He said that he was also the first to diagnose it in a wrestler and in a military veteran. And he defended the claim that he named it. Omalu said he picked CTE from several previously existing terms that had been used to describe traumatic brain injuries "for the purposes of precedents, so that nobody would accuse me as a radical." Using the three words with their acronym, he said, was more of a branding exercise — "making it a proper noun" — than scientific nomenclature. "What I did there is not medicine," Omalu said. "It's business management." Arthur Caplan, the director of medical ethics at the NYU school of medicine, said publicly exaggerating one's contributions is "troubled," but not enough to disqualify the underlying research. "It would be unethical not to acknowledge the work that came before. It's certainly un-collegial," Caplan said. □



In this 2010 photo, Dr. Bennet Omalu, left, co-director of the Brain Injury Research Institute at West Virginia University, talks with Dr. Ira R. Casson, a neurologist and former co-chairman of the NFL Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Committee, before a House Judiciary Committee hearing entitled "Legal Issues Relating to Football Head Injuries, Part II" in Detroit.

(AP Photo/Paul Sancya)

for years, giving a detailed description about how he came to name that disease "chronic traumatic encephalopathy." But Omalu neither discovered the disease nor named it, according to scientific journals and brain researchers who were interviewed by The Associated Press. And though no one doubts that Omalu's diagnosis of Pittsburgh Steelers center Mike Webster was pivotal in understanding the dangers of football, fellow researchers and a medical ethicist say Omalu goes too far when he publicly takes credit for naming or discovering CTE. "It's just not true, and I think he knows that," said William Stewart, a neuropathologist at Queen Elizabeth Uni-

AP on Thursday, Omalu angrily defended his work and attributed the criticisms to "people historically who have made a systematic attempt to discredit me, and to marginalize me." "This is totally false. And write that in a big font, that it is totally and completely false," he shouted into the phone. "There is a good deal of jealousy and envy in my field. For me to come out and discover the paradigm shift, it upset some people. I am well aware of that." Sony Pictures, which will release "Concussion" on Christmas Day, issued a statement on Thursday that also noted "competing interests and agendas" in the field. "It is not surprising that there are those that are still try-

sion" is certain to revive that debate. Dozens of former football players have been posthumously diagnosed with CTE after descending into lives of depression, alcohol or drug abuse, violent behavior and even suicide. And what is also beyond dispute is the personal struggle Omalu went through after the NFL sought to discredit his research rather than confront the threat to long-term health of its players. But the new complaints about Omalu are not from the league and its supporters, they come from fellow researchers who say he is claiming credit he doesn't deserve. This time, the quarrel seems to center on what it means to discover

a name that has a good acronym that people will remember, even a 3-year-old kid would remember. That is how 'CTE' came about." In the PBS documentary "League of Denial," Omalu also claims credit for discovering and naming the disease. "Name it a disease; give it a name. Present it as a disease; package it," said Omalu, who has a business degree along with his medical credentials. "'Chronic' means long-term. 'Traumatic' means it's associated with trauma. 'Encephalopathy' means a bad brain. So I had both ends covered." At the time of Webster's autopsy, though, the disease had been known by that



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Eye on safety, California sets new rules for self-driving cars

JUSTIN PRITCHARD

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California regulators have unveiled a roadmap that would let consumers begin using self-driving cars, though manufacturers would have to prove the emerging technology is safe before a licensed driver could get chauffeured around town.

The approach California's Department of Motor Vehicles offered Wednesday in precedent-setting draft regulations is cautious, though it does allow that Californians could be behind the wheel of a self-driving car by 2017.

Among other safety-related requirements, the cars must have a steering wheel, and a licensed driver must be ready to take over if the machine fails.

Google, which is pushing to get cars without a steering wheel or pedals to consumers, expressed "grave disappointment" with the rules, which the tech giant said would slow deployment of technology with huge life-saving potential.

Though no manufacturer has said it thinks the cars are ready just yet, at least a dozen are developing the technology. Google has suggested a model could be ready for limited use sooner than the public expects. In September, the safety chief of its self-driving car project, Ron Medford, said the technology is "close to working pretty damn well."

California's go-slow approach could benefit Texas, which this summer emerged as a competitor in the deployment of self-driving cars when officials in the capital city of Austin welcomed Google prototypes for company-sponsored testing.

"Given the potential risks associated with deployment of such a new technology, DMV believes that manufacturers need to obtain more experience in testing driverless vehicles on public roads prior to making this technology available to the general public," the agency said in a written summary of its draft regulations.

Those draft rules set out how the DMV wants to move beyond the current small-scale testing of prototypes on public roads. The DMV can change the rules over the coming months before they are finalized, and the industry is sure to lobby for significant changes. That process will further delay rules that were due at the start of 2015.

There are no comprehensive federal rules addressing the technology, and as the largest auto market in the U.S., rules in California are a landmark in the development of self-driving technology.

Under California's framework, manufacturers would receive a permit for three years, during which time consumers could lease the cars but manufacturers would be required to keep tabs on how safely they are driving and report that performance to the state. Before the DMV grants that three-year permit, an independent certifier would need to verify a manufacturer's safety assurances. □



This photo shows a sign at Facebook headquarters in Menlo Park, Calif. Facebook is trying to make it easier to send photos as the holiday season's picture-taking frenzy escalates with the arrival of Christmas and New Year's Eve. (AP Photo/Ben Margot)

Facebook adding new 'Photo Magic' to app

MICHAEL LIEDTKE

AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) —

Facebook is trying to make it easier to send photos as the holiday season's picture-taking frenzy escalates with the arrival of Christmas and New Year's Eve.

The world's largest social networking service is offering a feature called "Photo Magic" that will automatically address a message so it can be sent quickly to Facebook friends identified in a picture. The option relies on the same image-recognition technology that attaches people's names to Facebook posts. With this twist, Facebook is deploying the technology in its Messenger application to make it more convenient to distribute pictures to a few friends and family members.

Facebook Inc. will highlight Photo Magic in a Messenger update that will start rolling out Thursday to users of Apple's iPhones and smartphones running on Google's Android soft-

ware. It will still be up to each individual to decide whether they want to activate Photo Magic. After the feature is turned on, it can still be switched off at any time.

The update is being distributed to a broad audience after a month of testing among smartphone users in Australia. Facebook is planning to make Photo Magic available to Messenger users everywhere in the world except in Canada and the European Union.

Messenger currently has more than 700 million users, about half the size of the audience on Facebook's social network.

Facebook is counting on Photo Magic to foster more allegiance to its Messenger app as it competes against other competing services such as Snapchat that have become particularly popular among teenagers and young adults.

If Photo Magic is turned on, it is supposed to promptly figure out if any of the

people in a picture belong to the smartphone owner's circle of Facebook friends. If some are found, Photo Magic creates a messaging thread that allows a user to send the picture to all the identified parties with two clicks.

About 9.5 billion pictures are already sent through Messenger each month, according to Facebook. The Menlo Park, California, company believes the volume will be even higher if Photo Magic's automation is successful in making it less of a hassle to pick out the images and figure out which people might be interested in seeing them.

As part of the Messenger upgrade, Facebook is also including an option that will allow users to change the colors of their exchanges with different friends, and switch the formal name of a recipient to a nickname, such as "mom" or "dad." Until now, Messenger's address book mirrored the names listed on people's Facebook profiles. □

Stocks slide as a late tumble erases post-Fed gains

MARLEY JAY

AP Markets Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Stocks skidded Thursday as a late drop erased the market's gains from the day before. Companies that sell

have been pummeled this year as the sluggish global economy reduces demand even as supplies become more abundant. U.S. crude fell 57 cents, or 1.6 percent, to \$34.95 a bar-

Metals prices gave up their gains from Wednesday. The price of gold fell \$27.20, or 2.5 percent, to \$1,049.60 an ounce and silver sank 54.5 cents, or 3.8 percent, to \$13.703 an ounce. Cop-

\$44.03.

Solar power stocks continued to rise after Congress agreed to extend a federal tax credit for commercial and residential solar projects. Leading Democrats and Republicans reportedly agreed to extend the 30-percent credit through 2019, after which it will wind down over two years. The credit was scheduled to fall in 2017 and be eliminated in 2018.

SolarCity gained \$3.57, or 6.6 percent, to \$57.26 and Sunrun added \$1.08, or 9.3 percent, to \$12.71. The stocks are up 55 percent and 62 percent this week, respectively.

"This was one of the biggest risks confronting the industry over the last year," said Angelica Jarvenpaa, research associate for Raymond James. She said solar power companies didn't know if the tax credit would be allowed to expire.

Jarvenpaa said the agreement is "among the best case scenarios" for solar power because it tells companies what they can expect for the next several years. She added that the extension will benefit the entire industry, including companies that serve homes, businesses, utilities and manufacturers of solar cells.

Shipping company FedEx said its quarterly profit grew as online shopping increased and costs in its express-delivery business came down. FedEx also said it thinks holiday shipments will rise by more than 12 percent from a year ago. FedEx rose \$3.01, or 2 percent, to \$151.84.

Streaming music company Pandora Media surged. □



A trader rushes across the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Stocks skidded Thursday as a late drop erased the market's gains from the day before.

(AP Photo/Richard Drew)

oil, gold and silver tumbled along with the prices of those commodities.

Thursday's slide marked the end of a three-day winning streak. Indexes drifted lower in the morning and fell sharply in the final minutes of trading. Energy stocks fell as the price of oil slumped again, and lower metals prices hurt mining companies.

The Dow Jones industrial average sank 253.25 points, or 1.4 percent, to 17,495.84. The Standard & Poor's 500 lost 31.18 points, or 1.5 percent, to 2,041.89. The Nasdaq composite index gave up 68.58 points, or 1.4 percent, to 5,002.55.

Energy and mining stocks

rel in New York. It had not closed beneath \$35 since Feb. 18, 2009 and traded above \$60 a barrel as recently as June.

Chevron lost \$2.90, or 3.1 percent, to \$90.54 and Marathon Oil lost \$1, or 7.3 percent, to \$12.78.

Natural gas, which has fallen to 16-year lows, gave up another 3.5 cents, or 2 percent, to \$1.755 per 1,000 cubic feet.

The price of natural gas has tumbled as demand has collapsed. Thanks to the warm weather, customers haven't needed much gas to heat their homes this winter. And demand from industrial customers has been weak.

per fell 2.8 cents, or 1.4 percent, to \$2.044 a pound.

Among mining stocks, Newmont Mining dropped \$1.47, or 7.7 percent, to \$17.61 and Freeport-McMoRan lost 57 cents, or 8.5 percent, to \$6.12.

Only utility stocks traded higher. Utilities have also struggled this year, but including a tiny gain Thursday, they have risen for four days in a row and are up 4 percent over that time. Utility stocks are seen as steady performers that pay regular dividends, and some investors think payments are going to increase. Duke Energy rose 47 cents to \$70.50 and Ameren Corp. gained \$1.03, or 2.4 percent, to

Exec who jacked price of lifesaving drug is arrested

TOM HAYS

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A boyish-looking entrepreneur who became the new face of corporate greed when he jacked up the price of a lifesaving drug fiftyfold was led away in handcuffs by the FBI on unrelated fraud charges Thursday in a scene that left more than a few Americans positively gleeful.

Martin Shkreli, a 32-year-old former hedge fund manager and relentless self-promoter who has called himself "the world's most eligible bachelor" on Twitter,

was arrested in a gray hoodie and taken into federal court in Brooklyn, where he pleaded not guilty.

He was released on \$5 million bail.

If convicted, he could get up to 20 years in prison. He left court without speaking to reporters.

His attorneys had no immediate comment.

Online, many people took delight in his arrest, calling him a greedy, arrogant "punk" who gave capitalism a bad name and got what was coming to him.

Some cracked jokes about lawyers jacking up their hourly fees 5,000 percent to defend him in his hour of need.

Prosecutors said that between 2009 and 2014, Shkreli lost some of his hedge fund investors' money through bad trades, then looted Retrophin, a pharmaceutical company where he was CEO, for \$11 million to pay back his disgruntled clients.

Shkreli "engaged in multiple schemes to ensnare investors through a web of lies and deceit," U.S. Attorney Robert Capers said in a statement.

Shkreli was charged with securities fraud and conspiracy.

A second defendant, lawyer Evan Greebel, of Scarsdale, New York, was charged with conspiracy and also pleaded not guilty. □

Apple names Jeff Williams as chief operating officer

The Associated Press

Apple named Jeff Williams as its chief operating officer Thursday, a job that hasn't been filled since Tim Cook left the position more than four years ago to become CEO. Williams has worked at Apple for about 17 years and supervised the launch of the Apple Watch, which

went on sale earlier this year. The company said he played a "key role" in the launch of the iPhone.

Apple also announced Thursday that it hired Tor Myhren from advertising company Grey Group to be vice president of marketing communications. He will start early next year

and will oversee Apple's advertisements, websites and product packaging. At Grey, Myhren was chief creative officer and president of its New York office. Apple Inc., based in Cupertino, California, also expanded the roles of two other executives.

It upped Johny Srouji's posi-

tion to senior vice president of hardware technologies from vice president and said Senior Vice President of Worldwide Marketing Phil Schiller would now add Apple's app store to his responsibilities. In afternoon trading, Apple shares slipped \$1.95, or 1.7 percent, to \$109.39. □

Cerberus taking a majority stake in Avon N. American unit

NEW YORK (AP) — Private investment firm Cerberus Capital Management is taking a majority stake in Avon's North American division.

The companies said that they believe the partnership will help to improve Avon's performance and boost shareholder value. Cerberus will get an 80.1 percent interest in Avon

North America in exchange for a \$170 million equity investment. The North American unit will be separated from Avon Products Inc. into a privately-held company that will include the U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico. It will be managed by New York-based Cerberus. The new company will enter into a licensing agreement with Avon for the

use of the Avon brand, the Avon product portfolio and other intellectual property. There will also be a transition services agreement to include IT and research and development. Pablo Muñoz, current president of Avon North America, will leave the company, effective January 4. Cerberus will name a new CEO for the business.

Cerberus will also make a \$435 million investment for a minority stake in Avon Products Inc.

Avon CEO Sheri McCoy said in a written statement that the New York-based company will focus resources on its top markets, adding that the investment from Cerberus will give it the financial flexibility needed to implement

plans for its international business.

Avon's board has approved the deal, which is expected to be completed in the spring. Avon will trim its board from 12 to 11 members.

The beauty products company also announced that it is suspending its quarterly dividend, starting in 2016's first quarter. □

FedEx tops Street 2Q forecasts, helped by online shopping

DAVID KOENIG
AP Business Writer

DALLAS (AP) — FedEx shares rose this week as the shipping company said that quarterly profit rose 4 percent, helped by growth in online shopping and lower costs in its core express-delivery business. The latest results cover the three months ending Nov. 30, capturing a sliver of the key holiday-shipping period. FedEx has predicted that holiday shipments would rise 12.4 percent over last year because of the continuing growth in online shopping.

The Memphis, Tennessee-based company reaffirmed its forecast for earnings in the fiscal year that ends in May.

After a much-criticized performance in 2013, FedEx and UPS beefed up holiday-season staffing and performed much better in 2014. For this year, they continued to invest in their ground networks but stood pat on staffing — about 55,000 seasonal workers at FedEx — even though FedEx predicted a 12.4 percent increase in shipments between Black



Mitchell Rodgers loads packages into his delivery truck at the FedEx Express station in Nashville, Tenn. FedEx shares rose this week as the shipping company said that quarterly profit rose 4 percent, helped by growth in online shopping and lower costs in its core express-delivery business.
(AP Photo/Mark Humphrey)

Friday and Christmas Eve. Many consumers have come to expect free-shipping promotions, and retailers have made promises that the delivery companies have struggled to keep. On Wednesday, Amazon.com was promoting its Prime service by telling shoppers they could

sign up and get free, two-day shipping on orders placed up to Dec. 22 for delivery before Christmas. "We have experienced extremely heavy ground volumes in the Northeast," FedEx Chairman and CEO Fred Smith said, adding that Monday was especially busy. But the system

"is running as scheduled," he said on a conference call with analysts.

Logan Purk, an analyst with Edward Jones, said in an interview that the 9 percent increase in shipments handled by FedEx trucks in the fall quarter indicated that the holiday season could be stronger

than expected. He was, however, disappointed that profit margins in the ground-shipping business continued to decline, which he attributed partly to FedEx acquiring low-margin businesses.

FedEx Corp. said net income in its fiscal second quarter was \$691 million, up from \$663 million a year earlier.

FedEx said it earned \$2.58 per share when it excluded the costs of lawsuits by drivers who argue they are employees instead of independent contractors and of buying Dutch delivery firm TNT Express.

That beat Wall Street expectations. Twelve analysts surveyed by Zacks Investment Research had forecast \$2.51 per share on average.

Revenue grew 4 percent to \$12.45 billion. Analysts surveyed by Zacks expected \$12.4 billion.

Before the report, the shares rose \$4.14, or 2.9 percent, to close at \$148.83, a decline of 14 percent this year. They gained \$7.57, or 57 percent, to \$156.40 in extended trading. □

China Southern Airlines orders 110 Boeing jets worth \$10B

HONG KONG (AP) — China's biggest airline said Thursday it's buying more than a hundred Boeing 737 jets in a deal worth about \$10 billion that comes just months after the U.S. plane maker announced plans to build a Chinese finishing plant for the aircraft type. China Southern Airlines is buying 30 Boeing 737 Next Generation jets and 50 737

Max aircraft, the company said in a statement to the Hong Kong stock exchange. Its Xiamen Airlines unit is buying 30 of Boeing's 737 Max jets. The Next Generation planes have a list price of \$81.2 million while the Max series aircraft sells for \$96.1 million.

However, airlines usually negotiate discounts on such deals and the airline

said it's paying a "significantly lower" price.

The order comes nearly three months after Boeing Co. signed a deal with state-owned Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China to build its first final assembly plant in China, for 737 aircraft. The company also said at the time that it landed orders for 300 jets from Chinese companies.

Boeing is battling with Airbus to win market share in China, which is forecast to become the world's biggest market for air travel and passenger airplanes thanks to booming demand from China's rising middle class.

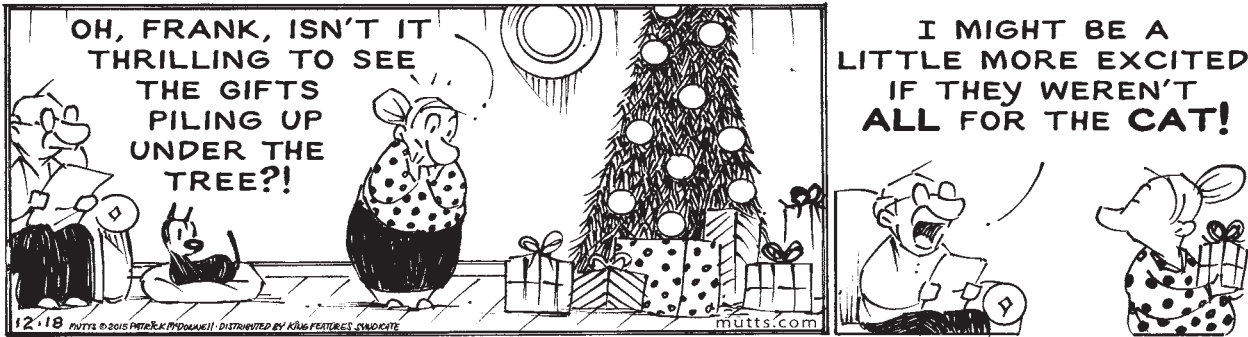
The Chicago-based company forecasts the country will need 6,330 new airplanes worth an estimated

\$950 billion over the next two decades.

The International Air Transport Association, an airline industry group, said last month that China would overtake the United States as the world's top passenger market by 2029.

State-owned China Southern is the country's biggest airline by passengers and fleet size. □

Mutts



6 Chix



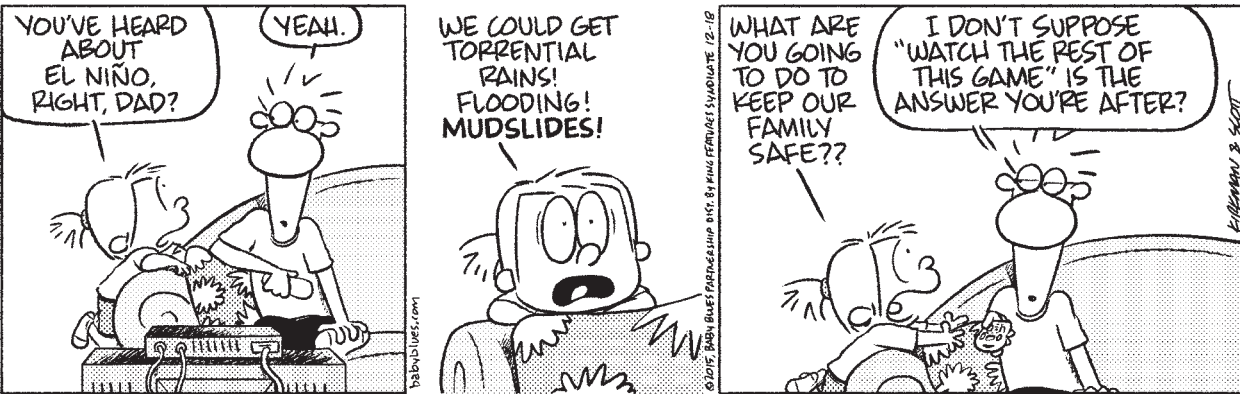
Blondie



Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

	6						2	
4					5	8	7	9
				9	3		1	
						4	8	
		2				5		
	9	3						
	5		8	2				
6	8	9	1					7
	1						3	

Difficulty Level ★★★★★

12/18

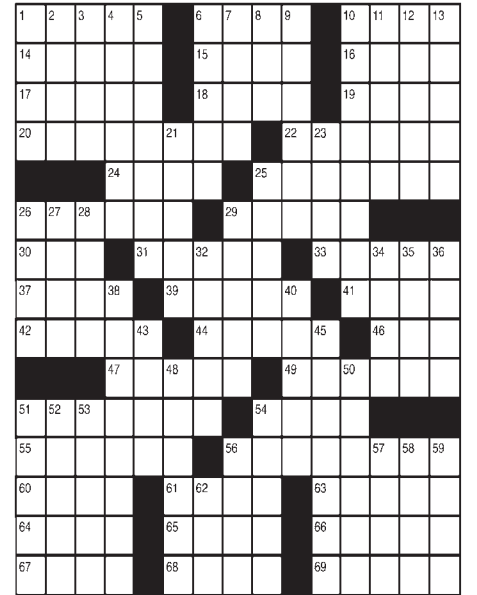
Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Yesterday's puzzle answer

8	9	4	6	1	2	5	3	7
2	7	3	8	4	5	6	1	9
1	6	5	9	7	3	8	4	2
6	1	7	5	2	8	3	9	4
3	2	8	1	9	4	7	6	5
4	5	9	3	6	7	2	8	1
7	8	6	4	5	1	9	2	3
9	4	2	7	3	6	1	5	8
5	3	1	2	8	9	4	7	6

ACROSS

- 1 In ___ order; quickly
- 6 Close noisily
- 10 TV remote control button
- 14 Crowbar
- 15 At a snail's ___; very slowly
- 16 Strong ___ ox
- 17 Amphitheater
- 18 Floored
- 19 SAT, for one
- 20 Pieces
- 22 Sharp as a tack
- 24 Word of lament
- 25 Slumberer
- 26 Shout
- 29 Booby prize winner
- 30 Motorists' org.
- 31 Refuse to obey
- 33 Poet John ___
- 37 Fashionable
- 39 Actor Matt ___
- 41 Twofold
- 42 Praise
- 44 Pete & Charlie
- 46 Enjoy a winter sport
- 47 Cloth napkin fabric
- 49 Played miniature golf
- 51 Child's vehicle
- 54 Actress Delany
- 55 Morning sickness
- 56 Place for a formal dance
- 60 Jillian & Curry
- 61 ___ off; annoyed
- 63 Do penance
- 64 Imogene ___
- 65 Mild oath
- 66 Labyrinths
- 67 ___ over; faint
- 68 Actor Calhoun
- 69 Newspapers and magazines



Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews

12/18/15

Thursday's Puzzle Solved

JAR	RABBI	BEST
OWES	OCEAN	EACH
NEAT	CHASE	FRAU
SLACKENED	ALMS	
RUES	ILL	
SHOVED	NOBILITY	
PORES	FOALS	LEO
RUGS	ALIKE	BIRD
ASA	AMASS	CEASE
TENACITY	HANDEL	
DEC	MANE	
SODA	ASCERTAIN	
AGOG	BEARD	TRIM
URGE	LARGE	HONE
LESS	ELLEN	NET

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12/18/15

DOWN

- 1 Strike with the open palm
- 2 Long sandwich
- 3 Above
- 4 Apartment, usually
- 5 Fifth wheel
- 6 Extends across
- 7 Regulations
- 8 ___ a test; pass easily
- 9 Military awards
- 10 Was important
- 11 Spend
- 12 One of the five senses
- 13 Go into
- 21 Rowed
- 23 Look for
- 25 Sings alone
- 26 Couldn't ___ it; was unable to cope
- 27 Hawaiian island
- 28 ___ down; deposited
- 29 Sour fruit
- 32 Like a room less furnished
- 34 Vienna's nation: abbr.
- 35 ___ back; recant
- 36 Went down a fire pole
- 38 Enormous

- 40 Himalayan nation
- 43 Location
- 45 Artificial tan provider
- 48 Tidier
- 50 Tooth plaque
- 51 Munch between meals
- 52 Paddled boat
- 53 1/16 of a pound
- 54 Family member
- 56 Carry
- 57 Seep out
- 58 Dollar bills
- 59 Disarray
- 62 Sense of self-esteem

Putin

Continued from page 8

"Someone in the Turkish leadership may have decided to lick the Americans in some of their private parts" in the hope that Washington would turn a blind eye to Turkey's deployment of additional troops to Iraq if they down a Russian plane, Putin said. But the Russian leader also said that Kerry's visit to Moscow has shown that "the American side is ready to move toward joint settlement of the issues that can only be settled together." "We are ready and we want to develop our ties with the United States," he said. "We are open, and we will work with any president the American people will vote for."

As he was leaving the hall, Putin was asked about Trump. He called the GOP contender the "absolute leader" in the race, and a "bright and talented man." Putin added he "certainly welcomes" Trump's calls for better U.S.-Russia ties. On other issues, Putin said Russia was working with

Egypt to restore air links severed following the Oct. 31 crash of a Russian passenger in the Sinai desert that killed all 224 people aboard. Moscow has said that the crash was caused by a bomb on the plane, and the Islamic State group claimed responsibility. The suspension of flights to Egypt wasn't political, Putin said, and only intended to ensure the safety of Russian citizens. He praised Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi for his "remarkable personal courage" in the fight against terrorism and said the flights will resume once Russian and Egyptian officials work out the necessary safety measures, including the presence of Russian experts at Egyptian airports. Turning to Ukraine, Putin said Russia was interested in seeing that conflict settled as quickly as possible. He urged Ukraine's government to approve legislation on holding elections in eastern regions, where Russia-backed separatists have been fighting government troops since April 2014. More than 9,000 people have been killed. □

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wk 49	room 2571	\$3,750
wk 48	room 517	\$3,750
wk 48 or 49	room 119	\$4,750
wk 48 or 49	room 551	\$5,500
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wk 51	room 347	\$12,500
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December 19
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24/7

Wetland loss, development put Kashmir bird migration at risk

AIJAZ HUSSAIN
Associated Press

SRINAGAR, India (AP) —

The cackle and cry of Kashmir's annual bird migration has long been a welcome ruckus for those living in the Indian-controlled Himalayan territory. It signals the summer's end, the coming snows and the global importance of Kashmir's environment for species arriving from as far as northern Europe and Japan.

But these days, wildlife experts say they have never seen so few birds — and so few species — feeding and breeding around the wetlands nestled between the region's mountain peaks and plateaus. A combination of climate change and haphazard urban development are to blame, scientists say.

Colorful birds like the whooper swan, stiff-tailed duck and cotton teal have not been seen in the area in recent years. While there has been little scientific study to quantify the falling numbers, former regional wildlife warden Mohammed Shafi Bacha says he counts only 18 species visiting today out of 28 that came three decades ago. Scientists routinely reject the state's official count of birds as unreliable, but even those numbers show a downward trend: During the winter of 2009-10, authorities said more than 1 million birds visited Kashmir's wetlands. Last year, they counted just over half that number.

"The bird numbers have been fluctuating over the years, but now there is a steady decline," Bacha said. He called for an "urgent and massive effort to revive these wetland reserves for protecting the birds."

Scientists say unbridled construction, piled up trash and the changing Himalayan climate — where warmer temperatures are melting snows more quickly and playing havoc with the seasons — are robbing

past century. Local scientists say seasons are shifting from their usual patterns, and precipitation is more often falling as rain instead of snow. "Loss of habitat and climate change are major factors," wildlife de-

region is still crisscrossed with thousands of miles (kilometers) of barbed wire and patrolled by hundreds of thousands of Indian troops.

The tense security situation has made addressing envi-

ronmental issues harder. Compounding the environmental challenge is a rapid change in how people are using the land. New neighborhoods are popping up around wetlands, with little regard to maintaining water flow. Swamps are frequently clogged by garbage. Water-logged rice fields are quickly being converted into orchards. Deforestation is unleashing soils that are filling in lakes. "I clearly remember a coin swinging down into the crystal clear water after I dropped it while crossing a small wooden bridge," said businessman Showkat Dar, who grew up near a vast swamp dense with willow trees and squawking geese that has since become a high-end marketplace in the main city of Srinagar. "That coin must be still buried somewhere under these commercial buildings." The loss or degradation of many wetlands has also left the region unable to absorb and channel floodwaters, leaving it increasingly exposed to flooding. Srinagar was inundated last year in disastrous floods that caused \$17 billion in losses to infrastructure and homes.

The decline in visits by migratory birds seeking refuge from colder winter climates further north should sound alarm bells for Kashmir's future, environmentalists say. "There's a great danger ahead if urban development is not linked to wetland management in Kashmir," said Ritesh Kumar, the head of Wetlands International in South Asia. The birds, he said, were "greatly impacted."

The Hokersar wetland, for example, has shrunk from nearly 19 square kilometers in 1969 to 12.8 square kilometers today, according to a study by Kashmir University's Department of Earth Sciences. Meanwhile, birds were already flocking back to a once-dried up wetland brought back to life by last year's floods in saffron-rich southern Pampore.

Recognizing the importance of Kashmir's wetlands, India's Supreme Court last year ordered authorities in both New Delhi and Srinagar to identify and preserve these ecosystems in the region. □



Migratory birds swim in wetlands in Hokersar, about 16 kilometers (10 miles) north of Srinagar, Indian controlled Kashmir. The cackle and cry of Kashmir's annual bird migration has long been a welcome ruckus for those living in the Indian-controlled Himalayan territory. It signals the summer's end, the coming snows and the global importance of Kashmir's environment for species arriving from as far as northern Europe and Japan. But these days, wildlife experts say they have never seen so few birds - and so few species - feeding and breeding around the wetlands nestled between the region's mountain peaks and plateaus.

(AP Photo/Mukhtar Khan)

the birds of their traditional watering holes and, in the case of visiting mallard ducks, their nesting areas. Scientists say the Earth's atmosphere has already warmed an average of 0.7 degrees Celsius (1.3 degrees Fahrenheit) in the last century, thanks to the release of heat-trapping greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide. But temperatures are rising more quickly at high altitudes like the Himalayas. Kashmir itself has warmed 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 degrees F) in the

partment researcher Samina Amin said.

The birds have long been a highlight for residents in the famed Kashmir Valley — a vast collection of connected wetlands and waterways known as much for its idyllic vistas and flower-filled meadows as for its decades-long battle for independence that has killed 68,000 people.

The violence has subsided in recent years, with resistance now mostly expressed through street protests. But the mountainous

ronmental issues harder. Compounding the environmental challenge is a rapid change in how people are using the land. New neighborhoods are popping up around wetlands, with little regard to maintaining water flow. Swamps are frequently clogged by garbage. Water-logged rice fields are quickly being converted into orchards. Deforestation is unleashing soils that are filling in lakes. "I clearly remember a coin swinging down into the crystal clear water after I

N.W.A. joins quartet of 1970s hit-makers in rock hall



N.W.A. members Dr. Dre, left, and Ice Cube appear onstage during CinemaCon 2015 at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. Los Angeles rap act N.W.A. joins a quartet of 1970s era FM radio rockers as inductees in the 2016 class at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. The rock hall announced Thursday, Dec. 17, 2015, that Chicago, Cheap Trick, Deep Purple and Steve Miller will join as members in an April 8 induction ceremony in Brooklyn. (Photo by Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP)

DAVID BAUDER

AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The groundbreaking Los Angeles rap act N.W.A. will join a quartet of 1970s era FM radio rockers — Chicago, Cheap Trick, Deep Purple and Steve Miller — as 2016 inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

N.W.A., led by Dr. Dre and Ice Cube, was elected after three unsuccessful nominations in a year when a movie about the group's career, "Straight Outta Compton," was a box-office hit. Their hard-core tales of life on the street on songs like "F--- the Police" made them a provocative chart presence in the late 1980s and influenced an empire of other acts.

Both Miller and Cheap Trick made it during their first

year on the ballot.

The induction ceremony for the Cleveland-based hall will be held April 8 in Brooklyn's Barclays Center. HBO will televise highlights later in the spring.

Guitarist Miller came out of the San Francisco rock scene and became a dependable maker of pop hits like "Take the Money and Run," "Fly Like an Eagle," "Jet Airliner" and "Jungle Love."

Midwestern favorites Cheap Trick succeeded with a highly amped version of Beatles-influenced melodies on hits "Surrender" and "Dream Police." Their "Live at Budokan" album is one of rock's best-known live sets. Guitarist Rick Nielsen and rumpled drummer Bun E. Carlos gave them an indelible live

presence.

Cheap Trick moved swiftly to capitalize on the honor, announcing Thursday they had signed a new deal with Taylor Swift's label, Big Machine Records. The band will release its 17th studio album a week before its induction.

"Thanks to all the fans who have supported us for all these years and to the Hall of Fame members who cast their votes," said bass player Tom Petersson. "We are excited and honored." The guitar riff for Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water" remains one of the most recognizable in rock history. Guitarist Ritchie Blackmore was a stalwart in a hard rock act that competed with Led Zepelin and Black Sabbath

for the loyalty of metal-heads.

Before shortening its name from the Chicago Transit Authority, Chicago was known for its jazz-rock fusion. The band had a string of pop hits including "Saturday in the Park," "25 or 6 to 4," "If You Leave Me Now" and "Does Anyone Really Know What Time it Is?"

More than 800 voters of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Foundation selected the inductees.

The influential disco-era band Chic is becoming the Susan Lucci of music, failing to win induction in its 10th year as a nominee. Janet Jackson, The Cars, Los Lobos and Yes were among the other nominees rejected. □

Jackson's 'Thriller' sets new record

A. MCCARTNEY

AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Michael Jackson's "Thriller" continues to break sales records three decades after its release.

The Recording Industry Association of America said Wednesday the album has sold 30 million copies in the United States and Jackson is the first artist to receive 30-time multi-platinum status. "Thriller" has been an even bigger seller over-

seas, with 100 million copies of the album sold worldwide since its 1982 release. Jackson's music experienced a surge in popularity after his unexpected death in June 2009. "Thriller" includes the hits "Beat It," "Billie Jean" and the title track.

John Branca is the co-administrator of Jackson's estate. He says "Thriller" remains the yardstick against which all albums are measured. □

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Funny robots, crazy hair: Pop culture appeal of 'Star Wars'

JOCELYN NOVECK
AP National Writer

OK, so maybe he was mixing his "Star Wars" and "Star Trek" references. But when President Barack Obama spoke of getting congressional leaders into a "Jedi mind meld" back in 2013, eight years after the last "Star Wars" movie had come out, he was displaying in one small way just how firmly the franchise had rooted itself in our

popular culture. Well, the new "Star Wars" is finally out. But since it might take you some time to get to the multiplex, here's something to chew on while you're waiting — 10 reasons "Star Wars" has retained its exalted position in the pop culture firmament:

IT MADE SCIENCE FICTION COOL

Just ask a science fiction



This photo provided by Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment shows, Mark Hamill, from left, as Luke Skywalker, Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia Organa, and Harrison Ford as Hans Solo in the original 1977 "Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope" film, included in the new Blu-ray release of "Star Wars: The Complete Saga". (Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment via AP)

nerd. "I remember going with my wife and saying, 'Look at these audiences!'" says Paul Levinson, sci-fi author and communications professor at Fordham University. "This franchise really brought science fiction, which had a cult following, into the mainstream in a huge way." And in a way, too, that managed to resonate with little kids, grandparents and everyone in between.

IT SPAWNED A PARALLEL UNIVERSE

And we don't mean up in space — we mean down here on Earth, in human shopping malls. The comics, the video games and, of course, the toys. "The films are the mother ship," says Henry Jenkins, professor of communications, journalism and cinematic arts at the USC Annenberg School. "Meanwhile, all these other forms are generating content. These integrated systems have become the norm for successful Hollywood franchises."

ESPECIALLY THE TOYS

How big has "Star Wars" been to the toy industry? "The biggest property the industry has even seen, bigger than any other by billions," says Jim Silver of TTPM, an online toy review site. "To put it in perspective, just imagine "Frozen"

lasting for close to 40 years, but with a much larger demographic."

HUMOR

One of the best things going for "The Force Awakens" — and this is hardly a spoiler — is its liberal use of humor amidst the action, a quality it takes from the early films, particularly from Han Solo (more on him soon) and, of course, C-3PO and R2-D2. "Robots had never been funny before," says Levinson.

UM, HARRISON FORD, PEOPLE!

To many, the dashing young Ford's embodiment of swashbuckling space cowboy Solo was the best thing in the original film — he seemed to be having way more fun and way less stress than everyone else. Well, he's still dashing at 73. And he's prominent in the new film.

CHARACTERS TO RELATE TO

Solo's one of the best, but the whole "Star Wars" universe presented characters people could relate to and remember. "In the end, characters and story are at the heart of the films, not the special effects," argues USC's Jenkins. "They have so many dimensions. Compare that to 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind' (which also came out

in 1977). Most of us don't remember those characters."

GENRE MASHUP

Another unique aspect to the franchise was how creator George Lucas mashed together film genres to create a multilayered world. These included the Western, the fantasy and science fiction. Jenkins also sees echoes of World War II films, "The Wizard of Oz," even Laurel and Hardy. "Everyone can have a corner of the universe that speaks to them," he says.

FATHERS AND SONS

What "Star Wars" line is more iconic than "I am your father?" (And to satisfy purists out there, it's "No, I am your father," not the oft-quoted "Luke, I am your father.") The father-son dynamic is "a motif that goes back to the ancient Greeks," says Levinson. Fans will be happy to know the motif figures again in the new film.

THE LURE OF THE SABER

Quick, name a movie-related toy that's had more staying power than the lightsaber. "I turned everything into a lightsaber as a kid — wrapping paper rolls, flashlights," says Gerry Canavan, a professor of English at Marquette who specializes in science fiction. □

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HARRISON FORD | MARK HAMILL
MON-FRI 6:15 | 9:15
SAT, SUN & HOL 3:15 | 6:15 | 9:15

STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS
HARRISON FORD | MARK HAMILL
3D VERSION
MON-THURS 5:30 | 8:30
FRI 5:30 | 8:30 | 11:30
SAT 2:25 | 5:30 | 8:30 | 11:30
SUN & HOL 2:25 | 5:30 | 8:30

3D VERSION
MON-THURS 4:45 | 7:45
FRI 4:45 | 7:45 | 10:45
SAT 1:50 | 4:45 | 7:45 | 10:45
SUN & HOL 1:50 | 4:45 | 7:45

SISTERS
AMY POEHLER | TINA FEY
WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES
MON-THURS 4:15 | 6:30 | 9:25
FRI 4:15 | 6:30 | 9:25 | 12:05
SAT 1:15 | 4:15 | 6:30 | 9:25 | 12:05
SUN & HOL 1:15 | 4:15 | 6:30 | 9:25

KEET & ROEN
MAMOUN ELYOUNOUSHI | NATHALIE MESKENS
WITH DUTCH SUBTITLES
MON-THURS 5:30 | 7:30
FRI 5:30 | 7:30
SAT 3:30 | 5:30 | 7:30
SUN & HOL 3:30 | 5:30 | 7:30

IN THE HEART OF THE SEA
CHRIS HEMSWORTH | CILLIAN MURPHY
WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES
MON-THURS 3:50 | 6:30 | 9:10
FRI-SAT 3:50 | 6:30 | 9:10 | 11:50
SUN & HOL 3:50 | 6:30 | 9:10

CREED
MICHAEL B. JORDAN | SYLVESTER STALLONE
WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES
MON-THURS 3:55 | 6:20 | 9:10
FRI-SAT 3:30 | 6:20 | 9:10 | 12:05
SUN & HOL 3:30 | 6:20 | 9:10

THE NIGHT BEFORE
JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT | SETH ROGEN
WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES
MON-THURS 9:30
FRI-SAT 9:30 | 11:50
SUN & HOL 9:30

THE GOOD DINOSAUR
JEFFREY WRIGHT | FRANCES MCDORMAND
WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES
MON-FRI 4:30 | 6:45
SAT, SUN & HOL 2:15 | 4:30 | 6:45

THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY PART 2
JENNIFER LAWRENCE | JOSH HUTCHERSON
MON-THURS 9:00
FRI-SAT 9:00 | 11:55
SUN & HOL 9:00

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Review: Family ties of Fey, Poehler tested by 'Sisters'

JAKE COYLE
AP Film Writer

In "Sisters," Tina Fey and Amy Poehler attempt to bring the most teenage of comedy genres — that of keg stands and drunken hook-ups — into middle age.

They're a long way from your usual house party movie hosts — your Belushis and your Efrons — and that's the point. Trying on ill-fitting dresses for their planned big bash, they request something "a little less Forever 21 and a little more Suddenly 42."

The film, written by Paula Pell (a "Saturday Night Live" veteran, like Poehler and Fey) and directed by Jason Moore ("Pitch Perfect"), is a brazenly crude farce about female arrested development that doesn't so much seek to rise above its ludicrous absurdity as much as ride it out.

It's a bumpy ride. While the tremendous wit and chemistry of Fey and Poehler is unquestionable, the big-screen meeting of the former "Weekend Update" hosts feels overwhelming mismatched. For starters, it's hard to imagine either being from Orlando.

That's the hometown of Maura (Poehler) and Kate Ellis (Fey), whose parents (played by Dianne Wiest and James Brolin) are sell-

ing their childhood home. This brings out oddly passionate feelings in Kate, a single-mother and jobless beautician.

recently divorced. It's a miscalculation that does more to doom "Sisters" than anything else.

Fey and Poehler are, how-

'80s-adorned bedroom and decide to invite their old high school classmates to an old-fashioned rager at "Ellis Island."

that, naturally, spins out of control. There are handful of solid guests like Maya Rudolph (as Kate's nemesis), John Cena (as a drug dealer, making his second fine comedy cameo of the year following "Trainwreck") and John Leguizamo (as a sleazy alcoholic).

But is there any doubt that as soon as Bobby Moynihan's sweaty nerd rings the doorbell, he's going to steal the movie?

There are laughs here, for sure, like the uptight New Yorker couple buying the home, who declare: "I want the front yard to be open concept."

But as has so often been the case when it comes to Fey's movie choices, an opportunity has been lost. It's becoming increasingly clear that if she's ever to star in a movie as good as anything else she's done (from "30 Rock" to her book, "Bossypants") she's going to have to write it herself. In the meantime, she and Poehler host this week's "Saturday Night Live." Now that should be good.

"Sisters," a Universal Pictures release, is rat-

ed R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "crude sexual content and language throughout, and for drug use." Running time: 118 minutes. Two stars out of four. □



In this image released by Universal Pictures, Amy Poehler, left, and Tina Fey appear in a scene from the film, "Sisters."

(K. C. Bailey/Universal Pictures via AP)

Fey, the poster woman of quick-witted comic smarts, has here been cast against type. She's the promiscuous, partying mess, while Poehler is the responsible, earnest career woman,

ever, extremely game for the movie and up for any silliness or embarrassment if it gets a laugh. With their parents' house already sold, they nostalgically sift through the relicts of their

The attendees are mostly parents that no longer know how to let loose, but a concoction of alcohol, drugs and desperation eventually unleashes a wildly freewheeling party

A Year in Pop Culture: Hellos, Goodbyes, and Caitlyn Jenner

JOCELYN NOVECK
AP National Writer

There were goodbyes (Jon Stewart, David Letterman, "Mad Men") and hellos (Adele!). "Star Wars" re-awakened, and a ballerina and an unheralded found-

honorees speak out for voting rights, gender equality in Hollywood, and privacy from government snooping. Meanwhile on TV, the swift downfall of "NBC Nightly News" anchor BRIAN WILLIAMS begins when

any at a yoga retreat. DAVID LETTERMAN says goodbye after 33 years on late-night TV ("Our long national nightmare is over," proclaim a succession of presidents in a joke montage.) Across the pond, baby

stirring World Cup win over Japan. In literary news, many fans of HARPER LEE's iconic "To Kill a Mockingbird" are stunned when that novel's hero, ATTICUS FINCH, is given a makeover as a racist in the author's

ment.

SEPTEMBER

It's a major year for comedian AMY SCHUMER: she signs a memoir deal in the high seven figures, a reflection of her rapidly escalating fame. On CBS, STEPHEN COLBERT launches his "Late Show" with the declaration that "I will be covering all the presidential candidates ... who are DONALD TRUMP." He then promptly falls into an Oreo-cookie coma as he consumes one cookie per Trump joke. By year's end, with Trump dominating headlines, Colbert might want to consider a bulk order. Democratic front-runner HILLARY CLINTON mimics TRUMP on Jimmy Fallon's "Tonight Show," but a few months later, she'll tell SETH MEYERS: "I no longer think he's funny."

OCTOBER

"STAR WARS" fans are going nuts: The trailer's out for "The Force Awakens." It is parsed for clues: Why are HAN SOLO and LEIA hugging? A new JAMES BOND film is out, but "SPECTRE" gets middling reviews. And hey, it's "BACK TO THE FUTURE" day! It's 2015, the year in which the second installment was based. Cars don't fly yet, but they did get the flat-screen TVs right — and our own kids are zipping around on hoverboards.

NOVEMBER

Hello indeed, Adele! The soulful Brit debuts her long-awaited album, "25," and it gives a huge year-end boost to the music industry; it'll sell a whopping 5 million copies in just three weeks. In fact, we're going to give Adele November's entry all to herself.

DECEMBER

And it's here. ("STAR WARS," silly.) Fans are camping out at the multiplex. While they await, they may wish to comb through some celebrity mags, where they'll see news of the latest high-profile baby,

SAINT WEST, son of KIMYE and step-grandson to Caitlyn Jenner. Maybe Saint can have a playdate with Charlotte. Maybe they can all go see "Star Wars" — the reviews are great. Relief echoes across the galaxies. □



In this February, 2015 photo, Jon Stewart appears onstage at Comedy Central's "Night of Too Many Stars: America Comes Together for Autism Programs" in New York. Stewart ended 16 years as host of "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart" in August.

(Photo by Charles Sykes/Invision/AP)

ing Father both hit the zeitgeist. But the pop-culture moment that fascinated us most? That had to be the emergence of Caitlyn Jenner.

Herewith, our annual, very selective trip down pop culture memory lane:

JANUARY:

Remember we began the year talking about North Korea? At the GOLDEN GLOBES, Tina Fey welcomes the TV audience to honor "all the movies that North Korea was O.K. with" — a reference to the SONY hacking story striking fear across the land (or at least La La Land.) But by next month, we're talking about....

FEBRUARY

...#OscarsSoWhite. The Twitter hashtag protests the fact that all the Oscar acting nominees are white; "Selma" director Ava DuVernay is snubbed along with star David Oyelowo. At the ceremony, prominent

he's suspended for making misleading statements about his role in news stories.

MARCH

We'll still have our nightly JON STEWART fix 'til August, but we learn that a little-known, 31-year-old South African comic, TREVOR NOAH, will succeed him. In Hollywood news, HARRISON FORD, 73, crashes his vintage plane into a golf course. Luckily for him — and for "Star Wars" fans — dashing Han Solo will make a full recovery.

APRIL

"I'm a woman." With those three words to Diane Sawyer, former Olympian BRUCE JENNER begins a public transition that will captivate the country. Stay tuned for more.

MAY

After seven seasons, "MAD MEN" ends, with suave ad man DON DRAPER (JON HAMM) having an epiph-

any at a yoga retreat. TOM CRUISE hangs off a plane (really!) in the new "Mission Impossible" flick.

RIHANNA, wearing a ginormous fur cape, and BEYONCE, wearing hardly anything, compete to steal the show at the Met Gala.

JUNE

Her name is CAITLYN: Jenner makes a smashing entrance — with a corset, a brand new name and a fascinating story to tell — on the cover of VANITY FAIR. Ballerina MISTY COPELAND launches a banner year when she stars in "Swan Lake," then is named the first black female principal dancer in the American Ballet Theatre's 75 year history.

JULY

Seems like we're always talking about TAYLOR SWIFT. This month she brings her own "squad" — the U.S. women's soccer team — onstage, days after their

"Go Set a Watchman," seen as essentially an early — and very different — version of "Mockingbird." And on one striking cover of New York Magazine, 35 of BILL COSBY'S accusers appear, all describing alleged assaults by the once-revered comedian.

AUGUST

JON STEWART ends 16 years at the "Daily Show" with a reminder to his fans to be vigilant against falsehoods — er, dishonesty — er misinformation (we're still not using his word of choice.) And on Broadway, in a transformation as unlikely as it is refreshing, onetime Treasury Secretary ALEXANDER HAMILTON — the guy on the \$10 bill — becomes a pop culture star, thanks to LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA's smash musical "HAMILTON." Miranda also finds time between shows to compose music for the Cantina scene in the new "STAR WARS" film, a nice pop-culture mashup mo-